Marxist History-writing for the Twenty-first Century

edited by

CHRIS WICKHAM

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1. Introduction

W. G. RUNCIMAN

I

The conference at which all but one of the chapters in this volume were presented was held at the premises of the British Academy in November 2004 under the title 'Marxist Historiography: Alive, Dead, or Moribund?'. It seemed an appropriate time not, or not only, because of the 'authentically world-historic event', as Alex Callinicos puts it (below, p. 166), which the collapse of the Soviet Union is universally recognized as being, but also because, as Chris Wickham puts it (below, p. 32), there has been a 'flattening of the ideological charge of debate' among ancient, medieval, and modern historians alike over the last two decades. If there is a single main reason for this, it is (I assume) the demise, after long years of debilitation, of teleological theories of history in any form. Obvious though it may now seem to readers of this volume that history (or, if you prefer, sociology) can never, any more than biology, be an authentically predictive science, the expectation that a proper understanding of the process of historical change would make it possible to forecast the future evolution of human societies was for a long time as confidently held by the epigoni of Spencer as by the epigoni of Marx. But, by the end of the twentieth century, it had become a virtual commonplace that there are narratives but no master narratives, theories but no grand theories, viewpoints but no privileged viewpoints, and no authoritative prophecies of the destiny of humanity.

To those interpreters of Marx who regard him as the supreme exemplar of a grand theorist with a master narrative inspired by a prophetic vision deriving from a personal viewpoint, he can remain of interest only because the influence of his predictions has been so disproportionate to their degree of correspondence with the actual course of later events. But once it has been accepted that any claim to be able to extrapolate the future of the human species from the study of its past is, for good Popperian as well as Darwinian reasons, inherently misconceived, Marx

can be read not as a prophet but as a diagnostician of both the intra- and the inter-societal conflicts and contradictions which characterize different periods in humanity's past. The discrediting of the paradigm of unilinear evolution from one stage of development to another does not diminish the value of a modified conception of evolution, in which human societies are seen as outcomes of non-teleological sequences which are not made inexplicable in hindsight simply because the inescapable part played by chance made them unforeseeable in advance. It is still open to Marxist historians to credit Marx with an original and fundamental insight into the process of historical change as such.

There are, of course, other reasons besides the failure of his prophecies why Marx can be, and often is, alleged to have lost such relevance to historiography as he may once have had. But three in particular, which bear directly on the arguments advanced by one or more of the contributors to this volume, rest on premises which are themselves open to criticism.

The first is what Eric Hobsbawm (below, p. 184) calls 'anti-universalism'—that is, the claim that no history can be written except from the historian's own local point of view and the interests and values which come with it. In the case of Marx, whose instrumental interest in history was, as Gareth Stedman Jones emphasizes (below, p. 148), as a means whereby to 'discover man's path to communism', any claim to universal validity made either by him or on his behalf might seem to be compromised from the outset by the local provenance of his and Engels' experience of capitalism and the intensity of their disapproval. But all historians approach their chosen fields of study with their particular assumptions and purposes in mind. The significant distinction is between histories which offer explanations of the past to which the available evidence compels general assent, and those which, if they deal in cause and effect at all, carry conviction only to readers who share the particular historian's interests and values. Since counterfactual speculations about what might have happened but didn't are notoriously difficult if not impossible to test, different historians will continue to arrive at different conclusions about what, for example, Soviet history would have been without Stalin. But if those who tend, as Callinicos puts it (below, p. 161), 'towards the more "objectivist" pole of the model of revolutionary process developed by Trotsky' are right, they are right whatever personal experiences or attitudes have led them to be so. It is not necessary to agree with Wickham (below, p. 36) that history is better 'if it has a bite to it, an uncomfortable edge, a critical edge', even if moral indignation can sometimes be as effective as disinterested curiosity in leading a historian to conclusions about causes and effects which turn out to be more strongly

supported by the evidence than their competitors. If Marx's contempt for Louis Napoleon led him to perceive more clearly how such a charlatan was able to achieve power as he did, and what would be the consequences of his having done so, then so much the better for the historiography of France.

The second is Marx's neglect of cultural representations and discourses. Why, as is often asked, did he give so little attention to the experience of women and colonial peoples in favour of the experience of the European, white, male working class? But in the present context, the question is slightly misplaced. The phenomenological description of what the events and circumstances of the period in question were like, for the different groups and categories of people whose cultures and societies the historian has chosen to study, is a separate exercise from reporting what were the most important happenings and explaining their causes and consequences: description in this sense is a complementary but quite different illocutionary act with its own distinctive criteria of authenticity, representativeness, and empathy. It might still be argued that by neglecting to describe the sufferings and aspirations of people who were as much the victims of capitalist exploitation as his chosen proletarians, Marx was missing the opportunity to give his moral denunciation of capitalism added perlocutionary force. But it is intrinsic to the logic of historical explanation, as Marx himself conceives it, that contradictions between the forces and social relations of production are perceived as what they are by few if any of the individual people whose experiences are being conditioned by them in ways of which they are unaware and which they are powerless to affect. It follows that his explanation of how one mode of production is succeeded by another would be neither strengthened nor weakened by having added to it extended descriptions of the thoughts and feelings of those living through the transition who may for other reasons deserve to be rescued, in Edward Thompson's phrase, from the 'enormous condescension of posterity'.[1]

The third is the apparent success of the champions of capitalism in beating the Marxists at their own game, as Callinicos puts it (below, p. 167). Marx, on this view, simply bet on the wrong horse: he failed to allow for the possibility that when the time came for capitalist and socialist modes of production to compete directly with one another it would be the capitalist mode that would be the stronger of the two. But this, again, is to miss the historiographical point. Once Marx is read as diagnostician rather than prophet, it can be argued that capitalism has lasted into the

[1] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1964), p. 12.

twenty-first century in rude good health for reasons by which, if he could have known what we know about the outcome and aftermath of the Second World War, he might have been less surprised than his critics assume. Francis Fukuyama's equation of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite regimes with the 'end of history' is too simplistic in its formulation and naive in its triumphalism to have much influence on historians, whether Marxist or non-Marxist, who seek to place the events of the last quarter of the twentieth century in their long-term global context. Admittedly, the prospect of a socialist revolution in the USA was always as unrealistic as the prospect that ownership by the Soviet state of the means of production would bring to an end the appropriation of economic surpluses by the masters of the workers whose labour had created them. But capitalism has survived and flourished, as Hobsbawm points out (below, p. 181), through the extension of its international reach into an increasingly globalized market, and because the achievement, which Marx also envisaged on occasion, of political power by the proletariat through the ballot box impelled the governments of the advanced capitalist countries to have regard to working-class interests in ways which made any attempt to overturn the liberal-democratic state by a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat increasingly unlikely. Here, the point can be simply put by remarking that if the arguments advanced in their contributions by Wickham and Robert Brenner can be shown to be mistaken, it will be for reasons which have nothing to do with the reasons for which socialism lost and capitalism won when America and Russia came, as Tocqueville had speculated that they might, to divide the world between them.

II

To substitute Marx the diagnostician for Marx the prophet helps also to account for the continuing impact of his journalism, and particularly his writings about France. There must be many present-day readers ready to agree with Edmund Wilson that '[t]hese writings of Marx are electrical. Nowhere perhaps in the history of thought is the reader so made to feel the excitement of a new intellectual discovery.'[2] It is readily understandable that Catherine Hall should want to quote the famous passages from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* ('first time as tragedy, second as farce', 'as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes') in support of the reminder which

[2] E. Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (London, 1940), p. 203.

she sees Marx as giving of the 'centrality of *class* and of *colonialism*' (below, p. 118) to the period with which she deals, or that Callinicos should cite *The Eighteenth Brumaire* (below, p. 159) as the first instance of a 'genre of Marxist historical writing that . . . seeks to make sense of some contemporary event by constructing a narrative of it informed by the Marxist theory of history'. As with any journalist who writes prolifically about contemporary events, Marx (and Engels likewise) appears in hindsight to have been as inept in some of his attempts to guess what would happen next as he was perceptive in others. Nor was the likelihood of Marx being consistently vindicated increased by his active involvement in revolutionary politics and the tactical shifts of position which this entailed. But his worst guesses do not in themselves prove his theory of history to be wrong any more than his best ones prove it to be right. The test is the extent to which the history of France can be shown—with hindsight—to conform to the model adumbrated in *The Class Struggles in France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire.*

On this, the problem for Marxist historians is not only that there are 'inconveniences', as Stedman Jones puts it (below, p. 147), in the difficulty Marx had in applying a 'socially determinist approach to the explanation of [French] republicanism or to the essentially *constitutional* character of the struggle between elected president and elected assembly'. It is also that Marx's interpretation of the French Revolution itself is no longer tenable. He saw the French bourgeoisie of 1789 as being, in contrast to the Prussian bourgeoisie, the class representing the whole of 'modern' society against the whole of 'ancient' society. But this is as oversimplifying a distortion of the part played by the nobility in the Revolution as it is of the part played by the bourgeoisie. Although it was for a long time an orthodoxy among Marxist historians that the Revolution was caused, in the words of Jaurès, by 'la puissance d'une bourgeoisie parvenue à sa maturité',[3] extensive subsequent research has shown that the bourgeoisie was much less capitalistic, much more heterogeneous, and much more closely integrated into a nobility which was itself involved in a partial modernization of the French economy, than can be reconciled with the attribution to it of a self-conscious and decisive part in the sequence of improbable events which had been initiated by a *révolte nobiliaire* against the monarchy. A definitive explanation of the French Revolution remains as elusive as ever.[4] But to no present-day historian can the view of it as the overthrow

[3] Cf. A. Soboul, *Précis d'histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1962), p. 9.

[4] For a lucid summary of the state of play at the close of the twentieth century, see W. Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1999).

by a modern capitalist class of a superannuated feudal aristocracy still carry the conviction which it carried in the writings of Matthiez, Lefebvre, or Labrousse. That it was a revolution that resulted in the overthrow of the 'ancient' *régime*, and that economic discontents did much to mobilize the sections of the subordinate population, including both the peasantry and the people of Paris, whose support was necessary to its success, is not in dispute. But it was not the outcome of a predetermined two-sided class conflict of the kind that Marx's theory of history requires.

The conclusion I draw is not that *The Class Struggles in France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire* are no longer worth reading, or that Marx ought somehow to have allowed for the inherently unforeseeable changes which took place in France since he wrote them. It is that present-day Marxists may be doing him less of a service than they suppose by trying too hard to fit changes that he could not have envisaged into a scheme of interpretation formulated in and for the circumstances of his own place and period. To those of his admirers who share his hopes for the socialist future as well as his diagnosis of the capitalist present and the feudal and ancient pasts, the question 'What went wrong?' must be inescapable. Britain and France are disappointing enough. But how *could* the Bolshevik Revolution have led to Soviet Communism? How *could* the German working class and its leaders have failed to prevent the Weimar Republic from leading to Nazism? How *could* the Mexican Revolution have led to a form of constitutionalist authoritarianism in which capitalist property relations persisted within a single-party clientelistic state? And so on. But the job of historians is to explain what *has* happened, not to lament what didn't. The speculations and debates about lost might-have-beens which have exercised Marxists of different shades of more and less revisionist opinion, informed though they often are by detailed and careful scholarship, are more of a distraction than a help to those historians and sociologists for whom social evolution is progressive only in the limited sense that the future will always be different from, at the same time as conditioned by, the past. That does not imply that it cannot be grasped at any deeper level than the random interaction of accidentally influential individuals with the economic, ideological, and political circumstances of their time. On the contrary, the explanations which hindsight makes possible necessarily depend on there being an underlying process at work which has made some outcomes more likely than others. But nobody can say just how and why it has done so until after it has.

III

How likely then is it that, at the end of the present century, there will be historians whose explanations of large-scale historical change clearly derive from Marx's conception of the process of social evolution? The answer naturally depends in part on what Marx's conception is taken to be. Those of his interpreters who are most concerned to repudiate the view of him as an economic determinist may find that they have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. If the forces and social relations of production—or, as Brenner prefers to call them (below, p. 58), 'social-property relations'—are not, in Wickham's phrase (below, p. 47), the 'ultimate motor', then what remains distinctive about a non-teleological historical materialism? Assume, however, that the Marxist historians of the twenty-first century all agree, in accordance with Hobsbawm's quotation from Pierre Vilar (below, p. 187), that 'economics alone can never fully account for all economic phenomena, nor political theory for all political phenomena, nor the theory of the spiritual for all spiritual phenomena'. That will not debar them from continuing to insist that the strongest evolutionary force driving human history is economic rather than ideological or political and that classes in Marx's sense are its agents.

Some readers may, at this point, be disposed to query whether such a case can still be maintained, in the face of the objections voiced by Max Weber, in particular, to what he regarded as Marx's exaggeratedly one-sided view of the dominance of material over ideal interests. But just as Marx's readers need sometimes to be reminded that he was not a 'vulgar Marxist', so do Weber's readers need sometimes to be reminded that, as he said of himself, he was much more of a materialist than some of his contemporaries chose to interpret him as being. It is true that he insisted that political relations have their own autonomy (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*). But as was pointed out by George Lichtheim—who was not, as he himself says, by any means the first person to do so—Weber's sociology of religion can be quite comfortably fitted into Marx's framework:[5] although Weber allows for the possibility that ideas can divert the course of social evolution from one to another onward trajectory, he links the doctrines of the major world religions and the sectarian and denominational movements which grow out of them directly to the social location and consequential self-interest of their carriers. His disagreement with Marx was less over the importance of class conflicts in bringing about successive transitions from one stage of social evolution to another, than over the

[5] G. Lichtheim, *Marxism: A Historical and Critical Study* (London, 1961), p. 87, n. 1.

plausibility of Marx's vision of the socialist future. Here again, once Marx the diagnostician has been uncoupled from Marx the prophet, it becomes more difficult to maintain that his theory of history has been conclusively refuted. It can still be a question not of whether, but to what extent, his exposition of modes of production and the conflicts intrinsic to them can contribute to historians' understanding of the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds and the successive transitions between them.

Andrea Giardina's account of the changing role of Marxism in Italian history-writing about Rome may come as a surprise to anglophone readers for whom there is not an obvious affinity between recognition of the need to supplement literary with archaeological evidence and belonging 'to the Left' (below, p. 18). But there can be no doubt that the archaeological discoveries of the past few decades, of which many have been the work of Italian archaeologists, have added enormously to historians' knowledge of the nature and extent of trade and commerce in the Roman world and the significance of regional variations in both agriculture and manufacturing. For this among other reasons, the 'slave mode of production' is no longer quite what it was. Nor has the 'evangelical' Marxism, as Peter Brunt called it, of Geoffrey de Ste Croix, despite the 'critical respect' with which, as Giardina says (below, p. 24), de Ste Croix's *magnum opus* was received, converted ancient historians to his interpretation of Marx's concept of class struggle and its application across what is generally taken to be meant by the 'ancient world'. But non-Marxists can agree readily enough with de Ste Croix that the ancient world was characterized by *'the exploitation by the propertied class of the non-propertied* [his italics]';[6] and they are likely also to recall that Moses Finley, for all his concern to replace, or at any rate supplement, the Marxist category of 'class' with the categories of 'order' and 'status', speaks in the concluding paragraph of *The Ancient Economy* of the end of the ancient world being hastened by 'its social and political structure, its deeply embedded and institutionalized value system and, *underpinning the whole* [here, the italics are mine], the organization and exploitation of its productive forces'.[7] Although, as Giardina recognizes, one historian's crisis can be another's *continuità*—particularly, perhaps, in the period now generally referred to as 'Late Antiquity'—there can be no serious dispute about the magnitude of the structural differences between the early Republic, the late Republic, the Principate,

[6] G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London, 1981), p. 68. The difference, as pointed out by P. Brunt in 'A Marxist View of Roman History', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXII (1982), p. 159, is that de Ste Croix 'treats slaves, serfs, and debt-bondsmen as classes, if only because they were the objects of exploitation'.

[7] M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (London, 1973), p. 176.

and the Dominate, and the significance of the much-discussed *coloni* in the evolution of the forms of dependency which appear in the rural economies of Europe after the collapse of the Roman state. Although non-Marxist readers of Wickham's two influential articles about this, which he himself refers to (below, p. 33) as an 'explicit incursion into Marxist theory', may be disposed to query his later retraction of his view of the difference between tax and rent as a 'modal' difference,[8] the force of his argument about the weakening of the tax-raising powers of the Roman state and its relation to the growth of private patronage is not diminished in consequence. More to the point, to his non-Marxist readers, is his recognition that this is not an explanation of why the Western empire was replaced by the various Germanic states, which he explicitly allows to have been a political and military problem rather than an economic one.

When it comes to a Marxist history of the medieval world, Wickham's magisterial *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, with its wide geographical coverage and command of the full range of archaeological and papyrological as well as literary and epigraphic sources, deliberately concentrates on the relations between subordinate peasants and those in a position to appropriate the economic surpluses produced by peasant labour. Indeed, Wickham explicitly affirms his commitment to what he regards as Marx's fundamental distinction between the three modes of production in agricultural societies: slave plantations, peasant farming, and wage labour—to which he adds a fourth 'peasant mode' in which neither landlords nor the state extract surpluses in a systematic way. But few if any historians are likely to question the significance of that distinction, and Wickham's emphasis throughout the book on themes which, as he says in his Introduction, are those of 'a fairly classic social and economic history'[9] is hardly controversial in itself. The more difficult question is whether his avowed exclusion, in his words, of 'belief systems, values, gender roles and representations, ritual and cultural practices'[10] is a matter purely of taste and emphasis or whether it could be argued that these are variables with a significant causal impact on the changes which did (or didn't) take place in the societies whose modes of production he analyses. Ought he perhaps to consider more fully the possible implications of the view that 'we are dealing with communities fundamentally organized for war,

[8] C. Wickham, *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History* (London, 1994), p. 74.
[9] C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005), p. 7.
[10] Ibid., p. 825.

where the majority of recognized virtues are martial values'?[11] Or of the view that the render of money and services to medieval monks and clergy was in explicit expectation of 'the counter-gift of Christian blessing—baptism, "the Reading" (of the Psalms and the Gospel: that is, church services or regular occasions), confessions, penance and absolution, and, at the end of life, prayers for the dead'?[12] If these aspects of the behaviour of the populations of medieval societies are more than superstructural constructions with no reciprocal influence on the social-property relations which are coterminous with them, can even an avowedly 'social and economic' history afford to neglect them?

Questions of a not wholly dissimilar kind are raised by Brenner's forceful critique of Adam Smith's view of the transition through which 'pre-capitalist social-property relations were transformed into capitalist property-relations' (below, p. 60)—a transition which Brenner holds Smith to have mistakenly attributed to the expansion of trade which, since it was experienced also by countries and regions that did not make the transition, cannot by itself provide the answer. Present-day economic historians are (so far as I can see) still divided among themselves about the precise causes of England's agricultural 'revolution', to say nothing of its industrial one (whose consequences Smith could no more have been expected to foresee than Marx could be expected to foresee the consequences of the 'information revolution' of the late twentieth century). But it might be argued that Smith, who was by no means unaware of the significance of social-property relations, had a more robust explanation of English agriculture than Brenner gives him credit for. He was, after all, as explicit as Marx about the unintended consequences of the behaviour of economic agents who are subject to influences of which they are unaware: his merchants and artificers, in particular, are credited with no knowledge or foresight of 'that great revolution which the folly of the one, and the industry of the other, were gradually bringing about'.[13] But in the countryside, it is the terms of tenure of the English yeoman which he regarded as critical to achieving the extension and improvement of agriculture of which growth in manufacturing and trade was a necessary but not sufficient condition. He had an almost Weberian distrust of the 'turn of mind', as he called it, of the profligate proprietors who will dissipate their surpluses rather than reinvest them, and he had the same view as Brenner of Brenner's 'overlords' who control the means of coercion in their own

[11] P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1984), p. 14.
[12] P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1997), p. 333.
[13] A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. E. Cannon (London, 1961), I, p. 440.

districts and maintain their retinues out of the surpluses extracted from their dependent peasantry. But he attributed to the 'laws and customs' of England, in contrast to those of Scotland and elsewhere, the environment which incentivized the yeomanry to extend and improve and thereby help to enhance the 'grandeur of England'. He was also, as Tony Wrigley has pointed out, well aware that eighteenth-century Britain was 'treading the path long trodden by the Netherlands', although the forces that drove would-be self-sufficient peasants into the market were different in the two cases.[14] Is it right to read him as unequivocally assuming, in Brenner's words (below, p. 57), that individuals or families will always 'find it in their self-interest to allocate their resources or means of production so as to maximize the gains from trade'? He does not dispute that it is only under certain historical conditions that they do so, and he is at pains to point out that these were not present in those countries where feudal property-relations and what he calls the 'species of slavery' characteristic of Russia, Poland, Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and other parts of Germany still obtained. Conversely, Brenner agrees with Smith about the importance of landlord–tenant relations in England. Is it possible that a qualified Smithian and a qualified Marxian explanation of the commercialization of English agriculture may not be so very far apart after all?

IV

It would be disingenuous if I were to pretend to be fully open to persuasion that ideological and political relations never have an influence on the evolution of new forms of society out of old in a way that is not merely a superstructural function of 'social-property' relations, since my own 'sociology of power' to which Wickham refers in passing (below, pp. 34, 42) explicitly places ideology (modes of persuasion) and politics (modes of coercion) on a level with economics (modes of production). It is true that the three forms of power all cover further institutional distinctions of their own: in the mode of production, holders of financial power are often in conflict with holders of productive power; in the mode of persuasion, holders of ecclesiastical power are often in conflict with holders of secular power; and in the mode of coercion, holders of military power are often in conflict with holders of administrative power. But the successive transitions of human societies from one distinctive type to another involve a

[14] C. A. Wrigley, 'The Quest for the Industrial Revolution', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, CXXI (2003), pp. 152, 165.

threefold co-evolutionary process in which interaction between competing complexes of economic, ideological, and political practices generates new institutions of a mutually sustaining kind. Class conflict can on occasion be decisive in such transitions. But so can conflict between groups which are, in Marxist terminology, both *an sich* and *für sich* but are made up of incumbents of roles similarly located along one or both of the other two axes of power.

Furthermore, historical change is a co-evolutionary process in a second sense. Once cultural phenomena are allowed an autonomy that Marx denied them, they can be seen to interact with the practices defining modes of production, persuasion, and coercion at the same time that these are interacting with one another. In cultural as opposed to social evolution, the behaviour of different populations is altered by information which is transmitted from one person's mind to another's by imitation or learning independently of impersonal rules which prescribe how they are to behave towards one another on pain of formal sanctions as incumbents of their institutional roles. The causal connections between the two will often be found to accord with the Marxist interpretation of what used rather misleadingly to be called the 'sociology of knowledge'. But often too the representations, attitudes, norms, and forms of discourse which people differently located in the structures of their societies bring to their economic, ideological, and political roles are in themselves a force for change. This is more than a matter of adding to the explanation of how societies evolve from one mode to another a phenomenological description of the subjective experiences of the persons involved in it. It is a matter of conceding to those experiences, and to the terms in which they are conceptualized, an independent capacity to determine how classes and other collective agents of change affect the course of history as they do.

Such a multi-stranded, open-ended but at the same time path-dependent conception of how modal transformations occur is given added relevance by Hobsbawm's reminder of the way in which recent developments in the natural sciences 'have put an evolutionary history of humanity firmly back on the agenda' (below, p. 185). It is true that, as he says, the changes in individual and collective human life over the past 10,000 years have been far greater than can be accounted for by the workings of natural selection. Although cultural as opposed to social evolution goes back very much further than that, it cannot be explained any more than social evolution can by reference to maximization of inclusive reproductive fitness alone. But advances in palaeoanthropology, cognitive archaeology, evolutionary psychology, and behavioural ecology have dramatically enlarged our understanding of the extent to which the range of

possible variation in human cultures and societies has been at the same time both restricted and expanded by the shared biological inheritance of the human species. These advances might well have been welcomed as much by the Marxist biologists of the 1930s like J. B. S. Haldane and J. D. Bernal, with their public advocacy of 'Scientific Marxism', as they would have been by the Marxist archaeologist Gordon Childe.[15] But it is a less deterministic idea of evolution than theirs which informs the current neo-Darwinian paradigm. Within that paradigm, Marx's dictum that 'Men make their own history, but not as they please' retains all of its relevance. But it does so not on the Marxist model of contradiction, conflict, and final synthesis but on the Darwinian model of heritable variation and competitive selection in an ever-branching tree.

There are many historians to whose chosen topics the 'basic approach', in Hobsbawm's words (below, p. 186), 'to human evolution adopted by archaeologists and prehistorians' has only the most tenuous relevance. But for global (as opposed to 'total') historians, it offers a post-Marxist, but not necessarily anti-Marxist, framework within which a multi-stranded, open-ended, path-dependent but non-teleological narrative can give its due to universal human characteristics, without denying the uniqueness of the particular sequences of causes and effects which make different cultures and societies into what they are. This is particularly well illustrated by C. A. Bayly's recent *The Birth of the Modern World*. Bayly's 'multicentric' global history is 'determined by a complex parallelogram of forces constituted by economic changes, ideological construction and mechanisms of the state',[16] and cultural discourses are explicitly allowed causal influence of their own. Industrialization, proletarianization, globalization of markets, the emergence of a bourgeoisie, and the appropriation of economic surpluses generated by the labour of slaves, peons, apprentices, coolies, debt-bondsmen, sharecroppers, and female and child domestic workers as well as part- or full-time wage-workers are all a central part of the story. But Bayly also insists that both Western and Eastern religions were active agents of social change and that politics rather than economics decided how the surpluses were deployed, and which were the states best fitted in consequence to provide naval and military protection for themselves and others, as and when it was thought necessary to wage war. At the same time, 'modernity' is not, for Bayly, the teleological phenomenon which it is for the 'modernization theorists'

[15] See the remarks about Childe in S. Shennan, *Genes, Memes and Human History* (London, 2002), pp. 207–8.
[16] C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford, 2004), p. 7.

so much as, in Adam Smith's phrase, a 'turn of mind': being modern is a matter of thinking you are modern and modifying your behaviour by acting out beliefs and attitudes transmitted by imitation or learning, which thereby alter the economic, ideological, and political institutions both of the society to which you belong and of the other societies over which your own exercises hegemony. It is an irreversible process, but not a predetermined one. Bayly has no reason to disagree with Hobsbawm that innovations do not make themselves, that material and cultural forces and relations of production are not separable, and that decisions are not taken in a vacuum of imputed rational calculation. But that does not make of him a Marxist historian.

I cite the kind of history-writing that Bayly's book exemplifies because it brings global history and comparative sociology as close to each other as they were for Marx, but with the all-important difference that the teleology has gone. There are, as Bayly is well aware, historians who doubt, and no doubt will continue to doubt, whether comparative studies are 'desirable or useful' at all.[17] But once human history is seen as a continuous but inherently open-ended evolution from the emergence of language, art, ritual, and myth through to the very much later emergence of armies, churches, markets, courts (in both senses), assemblies, banks, plantations, manufactories, police forces, bureaucracies, and institutions of learning in which history is formally taught, it is as unwarranted for historians to dismiss out of hand the comparative study of societies as it would be for biologists to dismiss out of hand the comparative study of species. Historians for whom Clio will always be a Muse remain as free as ever to write about the past with the aim of describing to their readers what the lives of unique men and women were like for them in the unique environments in which those lives were lived. But that is entirely compatible with the kind of history-writing envisaged by Hobsbawm to which the 'bogus' debates, as he calls them, about whether or not history is a science are irrelevant. The one necessary caveat is that for the same good Popperian and Darwinian reasons that the future of human societies is not and never will be predictable, the historiography of the twenty-first century is not predictable either.

[17] C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780–1830* (London, 1989), p. 14.

2.
Marxism and Historiography: Perspectives on Roman History

ANDREA GIARDINA

I

While browsing through recent literature on the economic and social history of the ancient world, one rarely encounters the name of Marx, citations of works by Marx, or citations of works grounded in the Marxist tradition. If one happens to run into the name of Marx or the term 'Marxism' in an essay by an ancient historian, it will probably be in the context of a polemical remark. And it is even more probable that this polemical remark will be directed against the usual sitting duck, that is to say, schematic and dogmatic Marxism.

In spite of recurrent attempts to resuscitate it as an ideal foil for anti-Communist polemic, this degenerate Marxism essentially made its exit from the field of ancient historical studies in the 1960s, when a new declaredly Marxist and Marxist-inspired historiography came to the fore. This new historiography showed a considerable theoretical flexibility and opened up new research horizons. From a theoretical standpoint, this phase was rooted in a better knowledge of Marxian texts, especially the *Grundrisse*, whose study helped scholars to develop a richer and more nuanced view of Marx's thought on pre-capitalist economies. The *Grundrisse* acted as a powerful antidote to dogmatism; indeed, the positive effects of their discovery were observable even among ancient historians from what was called at the time the 'Communist bloc' (a definition whose application to the field of historical studies hardly does justice to the variety of approaches and interests flourishing in those countries at the time).

Marxist approaches to antiquity have always had to cope with certain difficulties originating directly from Marx's writings. These difficulties derived, in some measure, from the limits of Marx's own treatment of

ancient history.[1] His citations of concrete historical data are abundant but fragmentary, and his analysis of these data is seldom more than cursory. His terminology varies from one work to the other and often within the same work (the most deplorable inconsistencies being in the terms used for modes of production), and his definitions are sometimes incomplete. There were also other difficulties of a more general character, such as the fact that Marx never clearly defined the concept of class, nor fully developed a theory of transition or crisis.[2] Furthermore, we must admit that, although Marxism finds useful application in economic and social history, it does not allow the historian to work within the logic of modern economic science.[3] The *Grundrisse*, although a helpful source of inspiration for scholars seeking to develop a new Marxist vision of ancient history, did not by themselves offer a solution to these problems. However, the best Marxist historians have always allowed for a certain degree of flexibility, knowing that refusing to do so would lead them directly to the worst of evils, namely dogmatism.

In the following brief review of historiography roughly from the 1960s to the 1980s,[4] as a premiss to drawing a balance of the current situation, I have used the term Marxism in a broad sense, quite close to the 'definite Marxist flavour' so vividly described by Arnaldo Momigliano about thirty years ago.[5] It includes historians who called themselves Marxists, as

[1] See, for example, P. Lekas, *Marx on Classical Antiquity: Problems of Historical Methodology* (New York, 1988).

[2] Cf., however, M. Godelier's observations, s.v. 'Transizione', in *Enciclopedia*, XIV (Turin, 1981), pp. 460–94.

[3] J. Andreau, 'L'Italie impériale et les provinces: Déséquilibre des échanges et flux monétaires', in *L'Italie d'Auguste à Dioclétien, Rome, 25–28 mars 1992* (Rome, 1994), pp. 178 and 191.

[4] Although I have decided to focus on this period, when Marxism was especially widespread and an innovative trend in ancient studies, this does not mean I underestimate the significant prelude to this phase, which took place as early as the 1950s. Cf. M. Mazza, preface to E. M. Štaerman and M. K. Trofimova, *La schiavitù nell'Italia imperiale, I–III secolo* (Rome, 1975), an Italian translation of a Soviet book (Moscow, 1971) which gave a remarkably innovative contribution to the debate on Roman slavery. A German translation of an earlier, valuable book by the same author—*Die Krise der Sklavenhalterordnung im Westen des römischen Reiches* (Berlin 1964, formerly Moscow, 1957)—also had a good reception. R. I. Frank, for example, appreciated it for 'an unusual degree of independence as well as an exemplary respect for the evidence' ('Marxism and Ancient History', *Arethusa*, VIII (1975), p. 53). On Marxist historiography of the ancient world in the Soviet Union, see especially M. Raskolnikoff, *La recherche soviétique et l'histoire économique et sociale du monde hellénistique et romain* (Strasbourg, 1975); see also the selection of articles in M.-M. Mactoux and E. Geny (eds), *Esclavage et dépendance dans l'historiographie soviétique récente* (Paris, 1995).

[5] A. Momigliano, 'Marxising in Antiquity' (1975), later republished in *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1980), p. 752.

well as historians who employed certain Marxist categories and drew on Marxist theory, but without defining themselves as Marxists. Concepts, analytical tools, and models developed by Marx and the Marxist tradition circulated widely outside the strictly Marxist milieu. Even in its most eclectic formulations, this circulation was anything but negative. Indeed, the dialogue between these two groups of scholars is one of the most significant themes I discuss in the present chapter. It would make no sense to judge a given historiographic position by its degree of Marxist orthodoxy, just as it would make no sense to pronounce judgements based, for example, on Weberian orthodoxy. The combining of Marxist categories with those of other scholars (especially Weber, Polanyi, and Kula) is a sign of the vitality of Marxism, rather than of its weakening.

One of the most striking aspects of this historiographic phase is a trend to the formation of research groups which shared not only a closeness or ideological adherence to Marxism but also an interest in historical theory and a similar orientation in cultural politics. The importance these historians assigned to interdisciplinary approaches, and the need to be able to look at different types of evidence, stimulated the confluence of individual competences in group projects aimed at singling out new topics and developing investigational strategies, as well as stimulating debate. But the promotion of group work also had ideological reasons. It reflected a sense of community, a refusal (although often formal rather than substantial) of traditional academic hierarchies, a wish to keep individualism in check, and the rejection of erudite isolation. In a country like Italy, home to the strongest Communist party in the Western world—a declaredly non-revolutionary force which even its opponents recognized as an essential component of the country's democratic system—these forms of association also served as a vehicle for the ethical and political self-representation of cultural hegemony.[6]

In Italy, these group research experiments occurred early on, and were particularly significant. Especially notable was the group that formed around the journal *Dialoghi di Archeologia*, founded in 1967 by the Communist archaeologist Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli. This venture, supported by forms of participation and organization that were unusual for the academic world, strove to raise archaeology from a mere 'technical and professional discipline' to a form of 'historical research' with a strong

[6] It should be remembered that, in Italy, Marxism appeared in ancient studies far earlier than elsewhere: cf. Momigliano, 'Marxising in Antiquity', p. 753; on these antecedents, M. Mazza, 'Marxismo e storia antica: Note sulla storiografia marxista in Italia', *Studi Storici*, XVII (1976), pp. 95–124.

interdisciplinary orientation. In this perspective, group work took on an evidently strategic character: 'To allow archaeology to be conceived as historical research and not as a technical and professional discipline, collaboration between scholars today needs to be steered increasingly towards true joint investigations.'[7] No mention of Marxism is made in the 'Presentation' of the journal, but the great majority of the participants in the *Dialoghi* group were registered members of the Italian Communist Party or at least belonged to the Left. They were certainly perceived as such by the academic milieux and the institutions managing the national heritage of Italy. In those years, it was sufficient for someone to appeal to the need for interdisciplinary work to be pigeonholed, if not as a Marxist, at least generically as a Leftist.

As always, Marxist researchers studying such remote periods were confronted with the problem of conciliating this interest with their involvement in current politics. The less sophisticated Marxist historiographers usually dealt with this problem by adhering to actualizing social perspectives claiming to trace the dramatic and clear-cut laws of class struggle all the way back to the distant past. Thus, for these scholars, the rebellion of Spartacus[8] or the fall of the Roman Empire, attributed to slave revolts,[9] stood as significant lessons of history for the present.[10] The contradiction between these modernizing perspectives on social history and the criticism those same historians levelled at bourgeois historiography—accused of modernizing ancient economic history by attributing capitalist features to it—apparently went unnoticed. For those who did not believe in the validity of such approaches, the task of conciliating study with political commitment was undoubtedly harder. As long as the theme of agrarian reform had maintained a certain centrality in western Europe, it had been possible to highlight the connections between the history

[7] The foundation of the group and journal is briefly re-evoked by R. Bianchi Bandinelli in *AA., BB.AA. e BC.: L'Italia storica e artistica allo sbaraglio* (Bari, 1974), pp. 272–5. On the political and cultural context of this event, see M. Barbanera, *Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli: Biografia ed epistolario di un grande archeologo* (Geneva and Milan, 2003), pp. 347–50.

[8] W. Z. Rubinsohn, *Spartacus' Uprising and Soviet Historical Writing* (Oxford, 1987, formerly Konstanz, 1983).

[9] A celebrated and early critique of this theory was put forward by S. Mazzarino, 'Si può parlare di rivoluzione sociale alla fine del mondo antico?' (1961), later republished in *Antico, tardoantico ed èra costantiniana*, II (Bari, 1980), pp. 431–45; more in general, see A. Demandt, *Der Fall Roms: Die Auflösung des römischen Reiches im Urteil der Nachwelt* (Munich, 1984), pp. 316–46 and *passim*.

[10] On the modernizing inclination of some Marxist historiographers, see M. Vegetti (ed.), *Marxismo e società antica* (Milan, 1977), p. 13; Andreau, 'L'Italie impériale et les provinces', p. 191.

of ancient agriculture and the strategies of reforming politicians. One could still claim that knowledge of ancient history had a liberatory effect because, by historicizing nature, it avoided the rhetorical and political trap of naturalistic determinism. Only by tracing their original social meaning and later transformations could the signs impressed by the ancients on the landscape be effectively manipulated to assure the emancipation and progress of the peasant masses.[11] But as early as the 1970s, faced with the great transformations of European economies and societies, these arguments appeared decidedly old-fashioned. In the programme of the *Dialoghi di Archeologia* group, which was mostly composed of archaeologists and ancient art historians, the renewal of research approaches was presented as inseparable from commitment to the conservation of the archaeological, artistic, and environmental heritage.[12] Thus, left-wing ancient scholars welded their commitment to research to an important civil cause. More in general, the rejection of dogmatic Marxism allowed scholars of antiquity with Marxist leanings to give a modern sense to their studies, because it offered more flexible and effective ways to historicize the modern categories of political economy and thus criticize capitalist exploitation.[13]

Many of the guidelines which inspired the work of the *Dialoghi di Archeologia* group were shared by the 'Centre de recherche d'histoire ancienne: structures sociales et mentalités de l'Antiquité', founded at the University of Besançon by the French Communist historian Pierre Lévêque. In 1974 this group founded the journal *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, patterned after the Italian *Dialoghi*. Unlike the latter, however, this group was affiliated to a specific academic institution, and frequently discussed anthropological themes, mainly inspired by Maurice Godelier's Marxist approach.[14]

Concomitantly, a critical evaluation of contemporary Western tradition on antiquity was in course. It mainly focused on the role of 'classicist ideologies' under Fascism and Nazism. The earliest studies in this field were carried out in Germany and Italy, which had been more directly and

[11] See my essay 'Le comunità rurali tra natura e storia', in *L'Italia romana: Storie di un'identità incompiuta* (Rome and Bari, 1997), pp. 386–91 (on the great Communist historian Emilio Sereni).

[12] See the *Presentazione* of the first issue of the journal (1967), esp. p. 5.

[13] M. Brutti, Introduction to L. Capogrossi Colognesi, A. Giardina, and A. Schiavone (eds), *Analisi marxista e società antiche* (Rome, 1978), p. 13.

[14] M. Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1977, formerly Paris, 1977).

deeply affected by this propaganda and cultural politics.[15] These studies were furthered by the presence in both countries of a well established tradition of history of historiography and, in spite of uneasiness and resistance, did a good deal to democratize the image of ancient studies in the wider context of contemporary historical studies.

In the second half of the 1970s, groups of Marxist or Marx-influenced scholars found an especially suitable field of application for the interdisciplinary approaches they had been experimenting with when they began to look for new applications of the categories of 'mode of production' and 'socio-economic formation' for the historical investigation of Roman slavery. The official promoter of this approach—which was to have vast international resonance even in milieux which had remained completely extraneous to the spread of Marxism—was the Seminario di Antichistica of the Gramsci Institute in Rome, at the time undoubtedly the most important cultural institution of the Italian Communist Party. Compared to the Marxist-oriented experiences referred to above, the Gramsci Institute's group (founded in 1974) stood out for its special insistence on interdisciplinary study (it gathered a large number of historians of economy, economic thought, politics and society, law, literature, art, and material culture); its commitment to the theoretical study of Marx's reflections on pre-capitalist societies; and its decision to concentrate on a single major project[16] in which the relationship between theory and interdisciplinarity had an essential function.

In the 1970s, ancient historians with Marxist leanings were more erudite and versed in philology than their predecessors. This helped them to overcome an old bias against Marxist scholars, who used to be accused of not mastering the tools required for the interpretation of sources, and of favouring ideology over evidence and abstract schemes over the tangible routes of history. This accusation had been partially justified by the

[15] On Nazi Germany, cf. esp. V. Loseman, *Nationalsozialismus und Antike: Studien zur Entwicklung des Faches Alte Geschichte 1933–1945* (Hamburg, 1977). For Italy, cf. the debate 'Per una discussione sul classicismo nell'età dell'imperialismo', opened by L. Canfora in the journal he himself had founded: see esp. *Quaderni di storia*, II (1975); III and IV (1976); and, by the same author, *Le ideologie del classicismo* (Turin, 1980).

[16] The theoretical work of the Seminario di Antichistica of the Gramsci Institute was mostly published in Capogrossi Colognesi, Giardina, and Schiavone (eds), *Analisi marxista e società antiche*; on investigations on the slave mode of production, A. Giardina and A. Schiavone (eds), *Società romana e produzione schiavistica*, I–III (Rome–Bari, 1981); a further stage in research, where the role of Marxism however appears more attenuated, is documented in the collective research published in A. Giardina (ed.), *Società romana e impero tardoantico*, I–IV (Rome and Bari, 1986). After this third phase, the activity of the Seminario di Antichistica gradually came to a stop.

explicitly anti-philological stance taken by some Marxist historians of antiquity as early as the beginning of the last century.[17] But now a new Marxist historiography was coming to the fore. Its exponents mastered philological tools as well as any scholar from the most traditional and positivist academic schools. The real innovation of this period, however, was the coming to maturity and spread of a new philology: the study of material culture, which played an especially significant role in popularizing Marxism among ancient historians. While in other countries—first and foremost England—the study of material culture had long been regarded as no more than an investigation technique, devoid of specific ideological connotations, in Italy, where classicism continued to have a strong influence on archaeological studies, many saw it as a decidedly Marxist method. Besides raising, and sometimes solving, new issues, the study of the material culture of the Greek and Roman world contributed greatly to that 'democratizing' of the image of ancient studies which we have already observed when dealing with classicism.[18]

This historiographic trend began to lose momentum as early as the second half of the 1980s, and played itself out in the following decade. A lot of it has vanished today. Not long ago, it was not unusual for scholars of the ancient world to call themselves Marxists. Today this is a very rare circumstance. It is more frequent to see historians who do *not* call themselves Marxists being defined or imagined as such, merely because they employ Marxist categories such as mode of production and crisis. A few decades ago, in-depth investigations on Marx's thought on pre-capitalist societies gave rise to new research perspectives. Today, there is little reflection on Marxian texts and Marxist tradition, and scholars are sceptical that such reflection could suggest new perspectives and find concrete application in research. Furthermore, interdisciplinary research is certainly not typical of present-day historiography. If the need to deal with complex historical objects by combining different competences is ever voiced, it is more often than not reduced to simple ritual invocations of a

[17] See, for example, Brutti, Introduction, pp. 19 ff. On the endurance of these difficulties in the debate with some Soviet historians, see A. Momigliano, 'Risposta ad un critico russo' (1962), later republished in *Terzo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, II (Rome, 1966), pp. 795–9.

[18] In Italy this 'materialistic refoundation of classical studies' is especially connected with the studies of Andrea Carandini and his school. A wide debate, not without some harsh polemics, was sparked off by Carandini's book *Archeologia e cultura materiale* (Bari, 1975); on these reactions, cf. his introduction to the second edition (Bari, 1979). On the cultural atmosphere of Italian archaeology in this period, cf. N. Terrenato, 'Fra tradizione e trend: L'ultimo ventennio (1975–1997)', in M. Barbanera, *L'archeologia degli italiani: Storia, metodi e orientamenti dell'archeologia classica in Italia* (Rome, 1998), pp. 181–4.

collaboration between historians and archaeologists. Drawing its inspiration from categories such as 'mode of production' and 'socio-economic formation', the Marxist historiographical phase was inevitably characterized by the belief that it was possible to highlight general morphologies characterizing different periods of ancient history. The plurality of modes of production was brought to unity through the theoretical concept of the existence of a dominant mode of production. Today this persuasion appears to be shared only by a minority of scholars, whereas the majority vie with one another in emphasizing the diversity of local situations and voicing their mistrust of unifying models. Even the continuing and growing worldwide popularity of Gramsci[19] seems to be independent of the cultural fate of Marxism as a whole. At any rate, the field of ancient history does not seem to have been particularly influenced by this phenomenon, in spite of recent attempts to apply the Gramscian concept of hegemony to the field of 'international' relations in antiquity.[20] This weakening of Marxist theoretical and historiographic approaches has coincided with the spread, in the same period, of the rejection of Marxism referred to at the beginning of this essay, a rejection which has pervaded the whole field of ancient historiography,[21] although it often seems to reflect an anti-Marxist bias that is not grounded in actual knowledge of Marx's work.

It would be wrong to deduce from the above that the relationship between Marxism and ancient historiography is, for the present, exhausted. It is worth looking at some significant aspects of this relationship which still continue. Although they have been confined to the fringes of the current consensus, they are objectively implicated in certain general issues on which the interest of both historians and archaeologists is focused at present. They continue especially in discussions on the crucial opposition between continuity and discontinuity, as well as the use of certain essential concepts of historical change, first and foremost 'crisis' and 'transition'.

[19] *Gramsci nel mondo: Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi gramsciani, Formia, 25–28 ottobre 1989* (Rome, 1995).

[20] A bare skeleton of a proposal has been put forward by J. Paterson, 'Hellenistic Economies: The Case of Rome', in Z. H. Archibald, J. Davies, V. Gabrielsen, and G. J. Oliver (eds), *Hellenistic Economies* (London and New York, 2001), p. 368. Paterson draws his inspiration from R. Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, XII (1983), pp. 162–75.

[21] C. Zaccagnini, 'Features of the Economy and Society of Nuzi: An Assessment in the Light of Recent Research', in *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians*, X (Bethesda, MD, 1999), p. 98.

To put these current issues into an adequate historiographic perspective, it is necessary to reassess certain aspects of the debate begun in the 1980s on the character of Roman economy and the role of slavery in it.

II

In the project of the Seminario di Antichistica of the Gramsci Institute, interdisciplinarity was conceived as a means to reconstruct the rise, growth, and weakening of a socio-economic formation in which the slave mode of production had a dominant role. By then, the affirmation of a non-hierarchical relationship between structure and superstructure, an insistence on the circular nature of processes, the rejection of economic determinism, and a scepticism regarding the existence of laws of historical evolution similar to those regulating natural transformations, appeared as well established tenets of the new advanced Marxist canon. Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, the Institute's historians were mainly interested in economic and social phenomena. Reconstructions of economic processes, trade routes, commodity production and distribution, and growth and regress, were mainly, if not exclusively, based on the study of pottery; hence the strategic importance of material culture for that new reconstruction of slave society.[22] The resultant general picture of Roman society contrasted sharply with the primitivist approaches revived by Moses Finley in those years, although it did not lapse into the opposite excess of postulating the existence of an 'ancient capitalism'.[23]

Thus, the Gramsci Institute's research mainly focused on the structural characteristics of the slave mode of production, conducting sweeping surveys of juridical forms and social values. Compared to traditional Marxist perspectives, one notices in its work a lower frequency of references to class struggle (indeed, the term 'class' itself seems to be avoided more often than not).[24] A markedly different approach was adopted by the

[22] See especially vol. II, *Merci, mercati e scambi nel Mediterraneo* of Giardina, *Società romana e produzione schiavistica*; the subject was further investigated by A. Carandini, *Schiavi in Italia: Gli strumenti pensanti dei Romani fra tarda Repubblica e medio Impero* (Rome, 1988).

[23] Andreau, 'L'Italie impériale et les provinces', pp. 190 f., contends that the scholars of the Gramsci Institute leaned towards either of two contrasting visions of Roman economy, a primitivist one, and one inspired by Rostovtzeff's approach, but I find his argument forced. A. Carandini, *L'anatomia della scimmia: La formazione economica della società prima del capitale* (Turin, 1979), p. 6 has correctly spoken of a 'third way' (in the sense of an alternative, not a mid-point) between modernists and primitivists.

[24] At any rate, in the most popular Marxist interpretation of the 1970s, put forward by E. M. Štaerman (see above, note 4), the issue of class struggle was incorporated, in an attenuated

English Marxist historian G. E. M. de Ste Croix, who in a monumental volume published in 1981 used the concept of class struggle as the interpretative key of all of ancient history. Even scholars who were completely outside this problematic reacted to de Ste Croix's book with critical respect.[25] De Ste Croix's approach is centred on a dramatization of Greek and Roman history seen in the light of social conflict, and a concomitant lack of interest in its morphological aspects.[26] It is undeniable that the lesser interest in class struggle in the research of the Gramsci Institute partly depended on the constraints and limits of archaeological evidence. It was also, however, a conscious decision, based on a conscious theoretical awareness. The question of the relationship between 'class' and 'status'—which had stirred debate in the most advanced Marxist circles as early as the 1960s[27]—was perceived as a controversial and sensitive issue. A basic problem had emerged, and one that Marxist (and not only Marxist) approaches to ancient history have had to deal with ever since: while morphological analysis runs the risk of giving an excessively static picture of society, the concept of class struggle does not seem wholly adequate—or, at least, not at all times or in every case—to explain morphologies and transitional processes.[28]

The singling out of a specific slave mode of production, restricted in time and space, had the merit of placing ancient slavery in a new historical perspective, at odds both with earlier Marxist analyses and with Finley's more recent formulation, which postulated the unity of ancient economy.[29] It was thus possible to cope with a paradoxical state of things: Marxism, usually regarded as a highly periodizing approach, actually had much less to offer the ancient world, in this regard, than other apparently

form, in that of the so-called 'inelasticity of the slave villa'. According to this theory, the economic cost of controlling the slaves was only one of the many factors that determined the crisis of the system and the growing importance of the hired farm labourer.

[25] *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London, 1981); the most in-depth discussion of the subject can be found in P. A. Brunt's review, 'A Marxist View of Roman History', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXII (1982), pp. 157–63.

[26] E. Narducci, in *Belfagor*, XXXVII (1982), pp. 739–42.

[27] See especially J.-P. Vernant, 'Remarques sur la lutte de classe dans la Grèce ancienne', *Eirene*, IV (1965), pp. 5–19; Vegetti (ed.), *Marxismo e società antica*, pp. 39 f.; for a more general perspective, see N. Morley's recent *Theories, Models and Concepts in Ancient History* (London and New York, 2004), pp. 80 ff. A clear overview is provided by P. A. Cartledge and D. Konstan, s.v. 'Marxism and Classical Antiquity', in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn (Oxford and New York, 1996), pp. 933 f.

[28] For a different point of view, see B. Hindess and P. Q. Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production* (London and Boston, 1975), pp. 285 ff.

[29] A. Carandini, 'Sottotipi di schiavitù nelle società schiavistiche greca e romana', in *Opus*, I (1982), pp. 195–8; cf. also Carandini, *L'anatomia della scimmia*, pp. 138 ff.

more neutral approaches. Traditional periodizations—those used in schools and universities—were still prevalently historical and political in character. To remain within the field of Roman history, one usually distinguished (as we still do) an archaic period, a middle Republic, a late Republic, the Principate, and finally the Dominate, the last phase of the life of the Roman Empire. Compared to this quite complex model, all that traditional Marxist periodization had to offer was an 'ancient mode of production'[30] lying roughly between the 'Asiatic' and 'feudal' modes of production, the latter mainly covering the field of medieval history. Too simple to be a match for the liveliness of the historical-political periodization, that Marxist model was not even able to account for the concrete social and economic historical evidence, which showed at a first glance that things were far more complicated.

An acute English reviewer observed that 'for most British historians' the volumes published by the Gramsci Institute were 'a cultural hurdle': 'The contributors are predominantly Italian, the viewpoint is primarily Marxist, many of the papers treat archaeological evidence. Not one of these ingredients is in itself unusual, but the combination produces the distinct and original flavour of a school of modern Italian scholarship which we sometimes find difficult to digest.'[31] In spite of this, one of the most significant chapters in the wide debate sparked by Moses Finley's book on ancient economy was the discussion between Italian and English scholars; a clear sign that the issues raised touched on interests that were acutely felt, at the time, in both historiographic cultures.[32]

The main discussion points concerned three closely connected aspects: the relationship (in Marxian terms) between use value and exchange

[30] Marx does not clearly define the logical and historical connections between the ancient mode of production and the slave one; an ambiguity which has created quite a few difficulties for his interpreters. Cf. Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production*, chs 2 and 3; M. Mazza, 'Marx sulla schiavitù antica: Note di lettura', in Capogrossi Colognesi, Giardina, Schiavone (eds), *Analisi marxista e società antiche*, pp. 107–45; see also D. Konstan, 'Marxism and Roman Slavery', *Arethusa*, VIII (1975), pp. 145–69.

[31] D. W. Rathbone, 'The Slave Mode of Production in Italy', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXIII (1983), p. 160 (this long review is well balanced and full of interesting ideas). For some subtle observations on the 'communication' problems between Italian archaeologists (especially Carandini and his school) and Anglo-Saxon scholars, see C. Wickham, 'Marx, Sherlock Holmes, and Late Roman Commerce' (1988), later republished in *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London, 1994), pp. 81 ff.

[32] It is astonishing that, while M. Finley, in his 'Further Thoughts (1984)' appended to the second edition of his *Ancient Economy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1985), pp. 177–207, gave adequate consideration to his discussions with Italian ancient scholars, this aspect is completely ignored in I. Morris's Foreword to the updated edition of the same work (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, and London, 1999), pp. ix–xxxvi.

value in the ancient economy and, hence, its degree of 'primitivism' or modernity; the degree of pervasiveness of the slave mode of production and the extent to which it could be said to have characterized the whole economy of ancient Rome; and, finally, the concept of mode of production itself, with the connected issue of continuity versus discontinuity. These concepts, however, have not subsequently attracted the interest they possibly deserve.[33] The most significant historiographical discussion—whose effects, as we shall see, are still strong today—focused on the question of crisis. In the last chapter of *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, Finley criticized the use of a concept which he regarded as inadequate when applied to the long-term process that led to the decline of slavery: 'The ancient slave system was fully developed and stabilized as a system by the second-century BC. ... But when did the "decline", the replacement, of the system, occur? No one can answer. The replacement was not a total one before perhaps the time of Charlemagne (as Marc Bloch argued); no contemporary was sensitive to the transformation ... Obviously, therefore, no one recorded the process or tried to explain it. We ourselves lack the data to *chart* changes as they were occurring; we can only observe the existence of certain phenomena at time A and of other phenomena at time B. ... A fundamental socio-economic transformation that took as long to complete itself as the history of modern industrial capitalism is not elucidated by the injection of the notion of crisis, so favoured by some Marxist historians, and I avoid it (now as before).'[34] His polemic was questionable on many counts,[35] but it touched on a theoretical point of the greatest importance, that is to say the relationship between the time factor and a fundamental concept of historical change. More in general, it implicitly raised the issue—which is periodically revived in contemporary thought—of the usefulness (or, rather, the admissibility) of applying to pre-capitalist processes concepts employed by modern political economy to explain the transformations of capitalist economies.[36] Finley's authoritativeness and the brilliance of his argumentation have

[33] See especially A. Carandini, 'Il mondo della tarda antichità visto attraverso le merci', in Giardina (ed.), *Società romana e impero tardoantico*, III, pp. 3–19; G. Woolf, 'World-systems Analysis and the Roman Empire', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, III (1990), pp. 44–58.

[34] M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London, 1980), p. 131; cf. also 'Further Thoughts (1984)', p. 180.

[35] See my critique in 'L'Italia, il modo di produzione schiavistico e i tempi di una crisi', in *L'Italia romana*, pp. 233–9.

[36] On this classic problem, see now C. Nicolet, 'Économie des Anciens, économie des Modernes: remarques historiographiques', in idem, *Rendre à César: Économie et société dans la Rome antique* (Paris, 1988), esp. pp. 26 ff.; more recently, Morley, *Theories, Models and Concepts in Ancient History*.

contributed to the success of his criticism, which was echoed especially—although certainly not exclusively—by English-speaking writers. At any rate, in the same years even some Marxist writers had expressed doubts about use of the term 'crisis'. In the eyes of these scholars, the theory of cycle and the theory of crisis stood in a close and constraining relation.[37]

Although the concept of crisis was deeply rooted in Marxist or Marxist-influenced theory and historical analysis, a watered-down version had long been employed by ancient historians of a completely different cultural provenance. When these historians spoke with the utmost naturalness, for example, of the 'crisis of the third century AD', they did so in the conviction of voicing a well established, empirically verifiable historiographic truth, and one that was devoid of ideological implications. If someone had accused them of being Marxists, they would have been dumbfounded. But today the attack on the Marxist concept of crisis has indiscriminately extended to the concept of crisis *tout court*, with two serious consequences.

First of all, it has given rise to considerable confusion, as a result of a failure to distinguish the concept of crisis, in the Marxian sense of the decline of a mode of production, from the more generic concept of crisis as a phase marked by a prevalently regressive trend. Thus, the debate on the crisis of the slave mode of production has been absorbed by the debate on the general economic and social crisis of Italy,[38] or the crisis of the third century AD; a clear sign that scholars no longer speak a common language.

Second, the rejection of the crisis paradigm has given rise to a new conformism marked especially by an insistence on the essential continuity of Roman history in the Imperial period. To deny that there was a crisis in Italy in the second century AD, or a general crisis in the Roman world in the following century, is perceived as an expression of the same non-ideological, anti-dogmatic attitude—an attitude that is sensitive to empirical data and wary of general models. Continuism, by its very nature, tends to grow indefinitely. Thus, it has expanded to embrace very long subsequent periods, transforming the late empire into a huge container extending well into the Middle Ages.[39]

[37] Cf. A. Schiavone, 'Classi e politica in una società precapitalistica: Il caso della Roma repubblicana', *Quaderni di Storia*, IX (1979), pp. 36 f.; cf. also *The End of the Past: Ancient Rome and the Modern West* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2000), p. 60.

[38] A. Tchernia re-examines the whole question in his important essay 'La crise de l'Italie impériale et la concurrence des provinces', *Cahiers du Centre de recherches historiques*, XXXVII (2006), pp. 137–56.

[39] A. Giardina, 'Esplosione di tardoantico', *Studi Storici*, XL (1999), pp. 163 ff.

These new trends are not insensitive to the lure of archaeology, but it is used in a different way. Previously, archaeological evidence was used to reconstruct the overall trends of Roman economy, as an indispensable basis for further syntheses. Now archaeology often has an opposite function: it is mainly used to highlight the variety of local situations, the lack of unitary processes, the primacy of regional history. This approach is punctuated with reductionist judgements concerning the possibility of drawing significant inferences about social history from legal texts. The recent debate on the colonate is especially revealing under that regard, having been marked by repeated declarations of scepticism that laws were actually enforced.[40] While Imperial legislation was once seen as a faithful reflection of social life, scholars have now gone to the opposite extreme: they seem to regard it as a mere expression of the wishful thinking of central power. Thus, distrust of generalizing perspectives can take on an anti-Marxist character, in the form of the rejection of the concepts of mode of production and crisis; or manifest itself as a clash of disciplines, as in the case of scepticism regarding the actual application of the law. Both phenomena, however, are an expression of the same cultural climate.

The rejection of the concept of crisis has been strengthened by the rise of another historiographical trend whose origins and motivations, however, are independent from the previous one, that is to say the 'optimistic' interpretation of late antiquity. The new radiant image of a period which several generations of scholars had regarded as obscure and decadent brought on, by its very exaggeration, a rethinking of the immediately preceding period. Many reasoned that, if in the fourth century many provinces of the Roman world witnessed great cultural exuberance and periods of economic prosperity, the third-century crisis must necessarily have been a circumscribed, marginal, fleeting episode. By insisting on the continuity of Roman economic and social history between the third and fourth centuries AD, scholars 'normalized' their positive image of the fourth century, presenting it as the natural result of a smooth transition from the previous century, whose crisis they either dismissed as minor or even denied. Thus, the recent flowering of late antique studies has remained faithful to a tenet formulated by the 'inventor' of late antiquity, the great art critic Alois Riegl, namely the rejection of the concepts of 'decline' and 'decadence', condemned as weighed down by a classicist bias and hence

[40] Cf. E. Lo Cascio (ed.), *Terre, proprietari e contadini dell'impero romano: Dall'affitto agrario al colonato tardoantico* (Rome, 1997); but one observes a similar trend with regard to other, equally important themes: A. Giardina, 'The Family in the Late Roman World', in A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, M. Whitby (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, XIV (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 399 ff.

incapable of doing justice to the vitality of the late Roman empire.[41] Scholars adhering to this perspective usually (and arbitrarily) perceive the concept of crisis as homologous to that of decline, and hence reject it for the same reasons. Unlike its rival, which by dramatizing history inevitably emphasizes conflict, continuism sometimes runs the risk of appearing 'reactionary'. In the case of late antique studies, this risk has been neutralized by the intrinsically 'politically correct' character of the concept of 'late antiquity' itself, founded on the appreciation of ethnic pluralism and the meeting of cultures, and sensitive to the virtues of creative minorities.[42]

The demolition of the concept of 'crisis' has dragged down with it another important concept describing social change: that of 'transition'. Today scholars use the term in a weak sense, and one that is tangential to its noble and cumbersome tradition, deriving from its similar use in the social and natural sciences ever since the nineteenth century. As a concept of Marxist political economy, 'transition' refers to the decline and rise of socio-economic systems. Hence, 'age of transition' means a time of passage between two periods, one where conditions mature for a change that is so deep that it takes on a 'periodizing' character. In social sciences, as in the natural sciences, 'transition' is a strong concept, and not simply a synonym for 'transformation'. Even in its most generic and limited sense, it implies the comparing of different forms. Only rarely has the concept found appropriate application in late antique studies.[43] Most scholars have spontaneously embraced, without any theoretical reflection, the persuasion that the term is suitable to indicate slow and protracted changes—changes leading to a different scenario, but in a linear way, with no tensions or leaps forward, or sudden caesurae.[44] In other words,

[41] On this problem, cf. esp. G. Bowersock, 'Riflessioni sulla periodizzazione dopo "Esplosione di tardoantico" di Andrea Giardina', *Studi Storici*, XLV (2004), pp. 7–13.

[42] I spoke of 'late antique' as a politically correct concept in 'Esplosione di tardoantico', especially pp. 158 ff.; this idea was later put forward again (but without any reference to my article) by J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'The Use and Abuse of the Concept of "Decline" in Later Roman History or, Was Gibbon Politically Incorrect?', in L. Lavan (ed.), *Recent Research in Late-antique Urbanism* (Portsmouth, NH, 2001) (*Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Suppl. Ser. 42), pp. 233–8.

[43] Cf. especially C. Wickham, 'The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism' (1984), later republished in *Land and Power*, pp. 7–42; on Byzantium, but from a comparativist perspective, J. Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London, 1993).

[44] G. Halsall, 'The Merovingian Period in North-east Gaul: Transition or Change?', in J. Bintliff and H. Hamerow (eds), *Europe Between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Recent Archaeological and Historical Research in Western and Southern Europe* (Oxford, 1995), p. 49, believes that 'transition' means 'slow process from one pre-defined state of affairs to another' and that the concept is useful to highlight 'a single line of development', and even goes so far as to contrast transition with 'change' (p. 48).

'transition' is used as the antithesis of 'crisis'. However, this latter concept of 'transition' has no specific implications as regards timing. A transition can be slow or rapid, smooth or syncopated; its speed does not affect the applicability of the concept. And inconsistencies in the use of the term do not end here. It has been argued, for example, that, when the issue of 'decline' versus 'continuity' arises—as it often still does in the debate on late antiquity—the concept of 'transition' is especially useful because it is 'neutral'.[45] This claim, too, is baseless. As a concept describing change, 'transition' presupposes a rejection of continuist hypotheses. It can be applied, instead, to the narration and interpretation of a decline, although not all transitions are declines.

Besides being used arbitrarily, the concept is sometimes just as arbitrarily rejected on the grounds that it is intrinsically teleological. It is accused of inducing scholars, when they investigate a period, to look exclusively for elements foreshadowing the subsequent period. Thus, it is argued, one misses the dramatic nature and complexity of historical processes.[46] Judging from the periodic recurrence of this criticism,[47] one would think that teleology was a prerogative of Marxist historiography as a whole, and of each of its individual concepts. But, as I have observed above, although some Marxist theorists have undeniably shown a penchant towards interpreting some epochal transitions in this way—especially the transition from feudalism to capitalism[48]—the theory of successive stages is more typical of the so-called 'vulgar' Marxism and the anti-Marxist vulgate than the true Marxian tradition. As regards, in particular, the passage from antiquity to the middle ages, it is sufficient to remember that as early as 1899 the Italian historian Ettore Ciccotti, a student of Marx and translator of *Das Kapital*, stated in his most famous work that 'serfdom', typical of the middle ages, should be regarded as 'a more regressive form of economy than the slave economy'.[49]

[45] N. Christie and S. T. Loseby (eds), *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 2.
[46] Halsall, 'The Merovingian Period', p. 38.
[47] For its occurrence in Hellenistic history, cf. J. K. Davies' recent article 'Hellenistic Economies in the Post-Finley era', in Archibald, Davies, Gabrielsen, and Oliver (eds), *Hellenistic Economies*, p. 18. S. Roskams convincingly argues, instead, that Marxism can very well coexist with non-teleological visions of social history, in his article 'Urban Transition in North Africa: Roman and Medieval Towns of the Maghreb', in Christie and Loseby (eds), *Towns in Transition*, esp. p. 175.
[48] Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production*, pp. 271 ff.
[49] E. Ciccotti, *Il tramonto della schiavitù nel mondo antico* (Rome and Bari, 1977), reprint of the second edn (Udine, 1940, first edn Turin, 1899), p. 309.

Actually, teleology lurks unseen in a metaphor which is foreign to Marxism but widespread in contemporary historiography of late antiquity; namely the apparently innocuous concept of 'root'. Several authors claim that many characteristics of modern and contemporary Europe have their *roots* in late antiquity.[50] The concept of 'root', however, is intrinsically flawed. It is based on a sort of historiographic eugenics that weeds out the 'dead' past from the 'live' past and obscures the creative value of trends that have run their course, or failed. Its teleology is far more insidious than that blamed on the concepts of 'mode of production' and 'transition', because it is apparently based on common sense.

The strong insistence on historical continuity that pervades Roman and early medieval historiography today is based, once again, on a weak use of a strong category of historical interpretation: that of 'continuity'. In other words, an atomistic approach has prevailed, confusing true historical continuity (i.e. the continuity of systems) with simple permanence, which is an obvious and pervasive feature of all places and all ages, even the most tumultuous and dramatic.

In conclusion, the survival of Marxism in contemporary ancient historiography appears to be entrusted to some crucial nodes in the debate on historical change and periodization. Notably, no alternative has emerged so far to the morphological concepts of 'mode of production' and 'socio-economic formation'. Of course, one could just refrain from using them but, whenever the need for morphological analysis arises, those old Marxist categories will materialize, with all their limitations and geometric charm.

Note. This chapter was translated by Federico Poole.

[50] For bibliographical references, see my article 'Esplosione di tardoantico'.

3.
Memories of Underdevelopment: What Has Marxism Done for Medieval History, and What Can It Still Do?

CHRIS WICKHAM

In medieval history, as elsewhere, there has been a flattening of the ideological charge of debate in the last two decades. People can still be as rude to each other as they ever were, of course, including over macro-historical interpretations, such as, in the 1990s, the debate about the 'feudal revolution' which may or may not have taken place around the year 1000. But that debate, although it certainly had structural roots in some traditional Marxist arguments, and although it had considerable symbolic significance and emotional charge for some of its participants, had hardly any overt political content at all. It would have been different two decades earlier, and was: the 'Brenner debate' of the late 1970s, about the role of class conflict in determining different paths for socio-economic development in different parts of Europe after the Black Death, although largely rooted in empirical and structural disagreements, had a strong political edge, and the Marxists and non-Marxists among its participants were keen to identify themselves as such.[1] The first thing to do here is to try to identify exactly what has changed.

In medieval history, and indeed not only in medieval history, there seem to me four elements to this. The first is that the world of historians has become less ideologically divided, at least in western Europe, which I shall mostly focus on. A good decade before the convulsions in the Eastern Bloc in 1989–92, around 1980 in fact, the fight drained out of the

[1] For the 'feudal revolution' debate, see the references cited in C. Wickham, 'Le forme del feudalesimo', *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, XLVII (2000), pp. 15–51, at p. 27n. For the 'Brenner debate', see T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds), *The Brenner Debate* (Cambridge, 1985), which collects the contributions, all first published in *Past and Present*.

academy, for a variety of different reasons. In Britain the assault on all academic values by the Conservative government of the 1980s softened a substantial number of earlier internal rivalries; in Italy a revulsion against terrorism and an eventual realization that revolution was by no means imminent (a more common belief in 1970s Italy than in most places) led to a political quietism among academics which lasted a decade and more; in France the sudden death or eclipse of so many structuralist gurus in 1980–1 coincided with the surprise election of a Left-wing government and the beginnings of a world in which the compromises of real political power outweighed the ideological grandstanding that had been dominant there right into the late 1970s; and, everywhere, the generation who had grown up on the university barricades of 1968 and after got their permanent posts, grew older, and, whatever their politics continued to be, came to be seen as less threatening by their more traditional peers. All told, it was less necessary, all over western Europe, to fight. The only major exception was Spain, whose post-Francoist trajectory left a huge divide between Marxist, more generically progressive, and traditionalist intellectuals, which remains today. I have to say that I did not notice the 1980 conjuncture at the time, and my own most explicit incursion into Marxist theory, two articles about the fall of the western Roman empire, dates to 1984–5: unfashionably late, you might think by now.[2] And so it proved; the impact of those articles was hardly in political terms at all. They have tended to be read as neutral pieces of structural analysis, with people being, one might say, kind rather than either enthusiastic or hostile about their overt political content—the main exceptions being, once again, in Spanish-speaking countries (and also in some conservative circles in the USA).

That was in my view the major shift among historians; the collapse of Soviet Communism, the second element, contributed much less, except on the level of fashion. I do not know of a single western medievalist whose views it altered, although it was different in the countries immediately involved, needless to say. That huge change did have implications for Marxists, all the same. It led to the immediate demise of a religious version of Marxism, which had got in the way of more critical versions of the paradigm for so long; this was all to the good. It imposed on any serious Marxist the task of explaining such a sudden shift in Marxist terms. (Although that was not so hard: as Eric Hobsbawm has also commented, to use the terminology of Marx in 1859, the rapid developments in productive forces represented in western consumer choice and the first

[2] C. Wickham, *Land and Power* (London, 1994), pp. 7–75 republishes both.

couple of generations of the computer revolution were by the late 1980s in serious contradiction with the social relations of Soviet production, which had been developed for a different moment, that of primary industrialization, and which proved unable to change.)[3] And fashion is not irrelevant: a new generation of Marxist theorists did not appear in most European countries in the 1990s. But, all the same, it was 1980 or so which marked the major change; 1989 only confirmed the trend.

A third element is simply that economic and social history themselves began to go out of fashion, at least among the historiographical avant-garde, and the new movements—cultural history, gender history, discourse-based analyses—had much less of a purchase in Marxist theory, which had always been weak in these areas. People stopped reading Althusser or Poulantzas out of the French theorists and began to read Foucault, Derrida, Bourdieu—Leftists, for sure, but not classic Marxists by any means (though, to be fair, Derrida, irritated at the political flattening of the 1990s, did his best to reinstate Marx as a post-structuralist thinker in 1993).[4] Economic and social historians, alarmed by this, began to join together regardless of old enmities—I think for example of the ideologically wide-ranging, but very embattled, *Association d'Histoire des Sociétés Rurales* which crystallized in France in 1993. One might as well entitle this conference 'Socio-economic history: alive, dead or moribund?'; there have certainly been debates around that issue, and much of the defence one could put up for Marxist theories about the past could simply be extended to an entire historical sector.

The fourth element is as important as the first, and the two are related: historical explanation has become much more eclectic. In English late medieval economic history, Richard Britnell's influential 1993 book on commercialization, which can be situated in an interpretation of economic change factors which goes back to Adam Smith, ends with an explicit recognition of the causal importance of Marx's emphases on inequalities of wealth and power; and his second edition is happy to locate his arguments in the framework of the Marxian 'transition debate'. Steve Rigby's 1995 survey of English society puts a good deal of stress on Malthusian and, particularly, Marxist explanations; but he locates them in an overall interpretative framework derived from Frank Parkin's closure theory and Garry Runciman's sociology of power. John Hatcher's and Mark Bailey's

[3] See E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London, 1994), pp. 496–9. This point—reinforced as a separate issue by the sales of Soviet memorabilia—underpins one's growing realization that all the great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, three times: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce, the third as shopping.

[4] J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York, 1994), e.g. pp. 92, 174.

2001 survey of economic models of the period puts a Malthusian model, a Marxist model, and a commercialization model each on an equal footing, and ends up effectively saying that, given the complexities of real socio-economic development, we should simply use all three. In Italian economic history, Larry Epstein's recent (2000) work on late medieval market integration can be seen as a substantial contribution to our understanding of the institutional underpinning of Smithian commercialization theory, although its underlying framework is explicitly Marxist. I restrict myself to English-language literature here, but Pierre Toubert or Luciano Palermo show a similar range of theoretical sources for their work.[5] This eclecticism has one important consequence. The 'transition debate' about Maurice Dobb's work in the 1950s was one entirely internal to Marxist writers;[6] the Brenner debate in the 1970s was wider, but its participants all had labels. But now, take a large-scale international debate such as that over proto-industrialization: many of its initial theorists in the 1970s expressed themselves in clearly Marxist terms, for sure, but by now it is not just that the ideological charge has gone, as I noted at the start, but one also has to work hard to determine what the fundamental framing presuppositions of each contributor to the debate actually are, and in many cases I am not sure at all.[7]

The result of all these processes could be put like this: in medieval economic and social history, far from Marxist ideas being dead or moribund, they are everywhere. But they have been normalized. We have lost the Cold War imagery of Marxist versus 'bourgeois' historical interpretations, forever fighting it out, notwithstanding many mutual borrowings, and notwithstanding the personal respect for members of the other camp felt by plenty of practitioners (between Michael Postan and Rodney Hilton, for example). Instead, Marx simply becomes a major social theorist of the past whose ideas can be drawn on, just like Malthus, or Smith, or Weber. We would not have a conference like this on Weber; there would not be any point; we all use his methods, while rejecting any number of his

[5] R. H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society*, 1st edn (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 230–1; 2nd edn (Manchester, 1996), pp. 233–7; S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1995), esp. pp. 1–14; J. Hatcher and M. Bailey, *Modelling the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2001); S. R. Epstein, *Freedom and Growth* (London, 2000), esp. pp. 49–52; P. Toubert, 'Les féodalités méditérranéennes', in *Structures féodales et féodalisme dans l'Occident méditérranéen (Xe–XIIIe siècles)* (Rome, 1980), pp. 1–13, at pp. 3–4; L. Palermo, *Sviluppo economico e società preindustriali* (Rome, 1997).

[6] Collected in R. H. Hilton (ed.), *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1976).

[7] Compare the generally Marxist problematic in P. Kriedte, H. Medick, and J. Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization* (Cambridge, 1981), e.g. pp. 6–11, with the perspectives in S. C. Ogilvie and M. Cerman (eds), *European Proto-industrialization* (Cambridge, 1996).

empirical claims (Weber on the city is quite as dated as Marx on the Asiatic mode of production). So it is with Marx.

On one level, this is just as it should be; history gains from pluralism, and loses if its practitioners simply sit in their boxes shouting at each other. On another, it is a retreat. Partly this is because history is better if it has a bite to it, an uncomfortable edge, a critical edge. Class analysis used to be subversive; that it is not at present, with the flattening of ideologies, is a problem, not just for historians, but for the whole of civil society. (Gender history is the only arena which has kept that subversive edge, and I certainly hope it continues to do so.) But the retreat from an explicit Marxist debate is also, and this is more problematic, a retreat from thought-through theoretical approaches. I do not mean a retreat from model-building, which is there in most economic history and much social history, but the models thus presented now tend to be middle-range, or tactical, theories; people are for the most part much less committed to stating what their long-range, strategic presuppositions are, and, unless they do that, neither they nor anyone else will be able to interrogate them properly. The 'feudal revolution' debate suffered from a fatal fuzziness precisely for that reason. Hatcher and Bailey in their book, though certainly not fuzzy or inexplicit, retreat into Chaos theory as a means of avoiding any commitment to choosing between the economic models they describe, and defend this procedure by a vigorous attack on mono-causal explanations for socio-economic change.[8] This is fine by me; but (as they admit) causes are hierarchical too, and have systemic interrelations, which also need to be explored. Sophisticated variants of Marxism have this sort of systemic element; this is why they have been powerful, and why they remain to me convincing. They are also paradigms in the Kuhnian sense, and can therefore be replaced, if you want to replace them, only by other paradigms, which might supersede them because they explain more anomalies and assemble more middle-range theories in a coherent structure. The current pluralism does not seem to me to be making much attempt to do this; it is a challenge that is being missed.

For the rest of this chapter, I shall return to my title, and look, first, at some of the historical contribution Marxism has made to medieval history, and, second, at some aspects of this future challenge.

Marx, as is well known, was not very interested in the middle ages; at most he saw the period as the rough chronological locus of a pre-capitalist world which would turn capitalist when certain processes, such as the removal of the peasantry from their de facto possession of the land, the

[8] Hatcher and Bailey, *Modelling the Middle Ages*, pp. 208–40.

growth of wage labour, the 'primitive accumulation' of capital, occurred.[9] This schematic (or, if you like, ideal-typical) image was too generic really to tie even the most religious-minded Leftist historian down; it has acted as a methodological stimulus rather than a straitjacket. One element of Marx's view of the period does have to be acknowledged from the first, however: it was frankly teleological, privileging as worthy of study only the elements that would lead to the supersession of the pre-capitalist socio-economic system, the feudal mode of production. I shall come back to the problem of teleology later, and shall try to sidestep it, but it cannot be got around as a description of Marx's views. The country whose economic history best lent itself to that teleology was, of course, England, whose primacy as the cradle of the Industrial Revolution has never successfully been questioned, and economic historians of all persuasions have always accepted its logic in England; every aspect of medieval English economic history, from the expansion of royal borough privileges to the peasant land-market, has been read in the light of that grand narrative by everybody, as it has not in France or Italy or Germany. It may well be that part of the attraction of Marxist history to so many Leftist intellectuals in England in the middle third of the twentieth century was the self-evident nature of that teleology, and the urgent need to explore it in more detail than Marx did. Nor were they wrong in that; as has been noted often enough, the importance of the English Marxist historians in their field—notably Rodney Hilton in the case of medieval history—far outweighed the impact of Marxism on Britain at large.

The development of a Marxist medieval history therefore had to be creative, and was. It focused on three strands: the changing levels and means of seigneurial exploitation of the peasantry; the peasant reaction to that, both before and, in particular, after the Black Death; and the structural role of exchange in different centuries of the middle ages. The first and third of these were never the exclusive preserve of Marxists, but the second was for a long time, for it focused on social conflict, class struggle, which was capable of being flatly denied by some historical traditions. The 'history from below' element that has been one of the patrimonies of Western Marxism came into play strongly here, as peasant revolts and more generalized peasant resistance to lords were written up from the peasant point of view, above all for England in the Birmingham school of

[9] K. Marx, *Capital*, trans. B. Fowkes *et al.* (London, 1976–81), I, pp. 873–930, III, pp. 917–50 provide the basic frame, with idem, *Grundrisse*, trans. M. Nicolaus (London, 1973), pp. 459–514. A good recent overview is S. H. Rigby, 'Historical Materialism', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, XXXIV (2004), pp. 473–522.

Hilton and his pupils.[10] It would overload this chapter unnecessarily to try to give a full historiographical account here, but it is worth saying that the English revolts of the late middle ages are better studied than the French ones, and few people have tried to see the detailed process of class conflict systematically from a European perspective (Sam Cohn is the principal exception here).[11] In general, rather surprisingly you might think, most medieval peasant revolts are actually rather under-studied. But most treatments of them that attempt to understand peasant aspirations in a time of conflict are the work of Marxist or at least Marxist-influenced historians. So are most studies of the medieval peasantry which stress peasant protagonism in the construction of their own local societies.

The nature of peasant exploitation (notably through rent) and of the growth of exchange are standard elements in all medieval economic history, by contrast; Marxists like Hilton and E. A. Kosminsky writing on England, Guy Bois and Pierre Bonnassie writing on France, Reyna Pastor and Abilio Barbero writing on Spain, and Liubov Kotel'nikova writing on Italy are matched by historians of many other allegiances.[12] Sometimes they differ empirically, as over the level of rents (argued by Bruce Campbell and others to have been very much lower around 1300 in England than Hilton, Kosminsky, or, indeed, the non-Marxist Postan thought, for example).[13] But the most important element in a Marxist paradigm for medieval socio-economic development has been in the way

[10] R. H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free* (London, 1973); idem, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975); idem, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism* (London, 1985). A recent conspectus is P. Coss, C. Dyer, and C. Wickham (eds), *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007).

[11] See S. K. Cohn, 'Popular Insurrection and the Black Death: A Comparative View', in Coss *et al.*, *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages*. An important recent contribution is W. H. TeBrake, *A Plague of Insurrection* (Philadelphia, PA, 1993) on Flanders. For French revolts, see for example M. Mollat and P. Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions of the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1973).

[12] For Hilton, see note 10; E. A. Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1956); G. Bois, *The Crisis of Feudalism* (Cambridge, 1976); P. Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-western Europe* (Cambridge, 1991)—see, for France, the programmatic account in A. Guerreau, *Le féodalisme: Un horizon théorique* (Paris, 1980); R. Pastor, *Resistencias y luchas campesinas en la época del crecimiento y consolidación de la formación feudal Castilla y León, siglos X–XIII* (Madrid, 1980); A. Barbero and M. Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica* (Barcelona, 1978)—in Spain the list would be very long, and these are simply the doyens; L. Kotel'nikova, *Mondo contadino e città in Italia dall'XI al XIV secolo* (Bologna, 1975).

[13] B. M. S. Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Past and Present*, CLXXXVIII (2005), pp. 3–70, summarizes his argument.

these processes have been linked together. There are two important parts to this, the internal structure of the feudal mode of production, and the dynamic role of class conflict as a driving force in economic development.

The core point here is that agriculture, the main source of wealth in the medieval world and in the feudal mode in general, was in the hands of peasants. Peasants did not own the land (usually), but in practice they controlled their own labour power. The owners of the lands that peasants cultivated, their lords, did sometimes attempt to direct agriculture, but their main way of doing so was by forced labour on demesnes, and it took a great deal of organization successfully to control peasant labour power in that way; by the thirteenth century demesnes had been virtually abandoned except in England, and were only a relatively small part of agrarian practice even there. Lords instead focused on controlling peasant surpluses, which they took from peasants by force or by the threat of force; rent was thus not a product of market relationships but, rather, of the balance of power between an individual lord and his or her tenants. This was the way wealth was funnelled from peasants to lords, and this fundamental economic relationship, which underpinned all other economic patterns, was thus the product of class conflict: this was so no matter how successful, or unsuccessful, lords were in extracting rents. The whole social structure of the European peasantry (roughly 90 per cent of the population, varying between 75 and 95 per cent according to region and century) was itself largely patterned by that conflictual relationship, as lords (including rulers) used a variety of legal constraints—unfreedom (serfdom), or the localized judicial powers called *seigneurie banale* by the French, or the taxation powers of the late medieval West and the Byzantine empire all through—to affect the terms of that power relationship, and thus lordly bargaining power; and peasants did the same, by invoking immutable custom, or by paying for franchises that stabilized the dues whole communities had to pay to lords. Wider exchange relationships were important, but were also patterned by the basic struggle over rent, for entire regional and interregional commercial networks hung on the buying power of lords, and local town–country relationships were heavily affected by—indeed, determined in part—by the capacity of lords to force peasants to pay them money rent, and thus to enter the local market more fully than they needed to do otherwise (as in thirteenth-century England and France), or by their capacity to force peasants to switch from money back to produce rent if lords wanted to play urban markets themselves (as in thirteenth-century Italy). Urbanism and commerce were thus integral parts of the feudal mode of production, and did not in themselves undermine it. (This point was not recognized by

Marxist historians until after the Second World War, but it then became common ground.) Nor did rural handicraft and artisan production undermine it, as long as it remained part of a peasant-dominated work process, as agriculture did. What would in the end undermine the feudal mode was rural wage labour. Even this was a stable part of peasant agriculture and thus of the feudal mode as long as most of the latter was run by largely subsistence peasants; wage-labour was part of the peasant life cycle by 1200 in most of Europe, as unmarried children worked for their neighbours, and increasingly from that date onwards the poorest peasants eked out their holdings by working for their richer neighbours and on the demesnes of lords. By the late middle ages, rural proto-industry could also absorb the spare time of underemployed peasants, in return for wages. But while the core element of subsistence remained the peasant holding, wage labour was still economically marginal. Peasants would have to lose control of the land, and become full-time labourers, for the mode of production to change.

I think that this brief overview represents the core principles of a Marxist image of the medieval period. But it is also important to recognize that it would not be all that controversial among non-Marxist historians; the controversies, as is often the case, occur on the edges, over questions concerning the beginning and the end of this picture, or else the degree to which the picture excludes other elements. This lack of controversiality is in itself a demonstration of what Marxism has contributed to the period: it has contributed the main economic elements of the big picture, the leading paradigm. In part, of course, this is because one does not really have to be very Left-wing to recognize the oppressive elements of feudal economies; this has been common ground since 1789 or so among liberal writers, and by now one has to search in the wilds of Peterhouse or the 1980s École des Chartes or the Pontifical Institute at Toronto to find people who think differently.

What is there about this picture that non-Marxists might object to, then? One is simply that it is too economic, and excludes the rest of peasant social and cultural life, as indeed it does. (It also gives little attention to non-peasants, but given the overwhelming numerical dominance of the peasantry this may not be so great a problem.) Marxist thought has not been skilled at incorporating these fields of study, and settled for too long for various versions of 'reflection theory', which hypothesized that social and cultural phenomena somehow reflected economic relations. That debate is truly dead, as is also the belief that any single economic structure could really encompass all other relationships in a society; feudal social relations framed them in important ways, for sure, but did not cre-

ate them, and people who study culture will use other tools. More serious for the model I have outlined is that it gives little attention to gender relations, which permeated the world of work, but which were always wound about with cultural assumptions, and are notoriously hard to locate simply in class terms, as Catherine Hall stresses in Chapter 5 of this book; this, of course, is a challenge to all economic history, not particularly to Marxism.

A second issue is simply taste: not everyone feels that the imagery of class conflict is the main element they want to focus on in a study of medieval society. And indeed it is not the case that peasants always 'felt' conflictual when they dealt with lords.[14] They did not always pay huge rents; they often treated lords as patrons and protectors, and occasionally they did receive some measure of protection; open revolt was rare (peasants are too risk-averse for it to be common); they fell out with their neighbours, in faction-fighting, as often as or more often than they opposed their lords. Each of these points has been raised in the past as a challenge to Marxist interpretations, but all can in reality be incorporated directly into the Marxist paradigm. Of course real social relations are complicated, and very varied, and do not always passively reflect an overarching model. Marx knew it perfectly well too, as his *Eighteenth Brumaire* shows. The key point is that peasants and lords were structurally opposed, in that they both lived off the same surplus, but only one group did the work to gain it; and they were both fully aware of that. That sometimes peasants did not object to it, or that they had other immediate concerns as well, does not take away from that structural opposition. Peasants knew they were different; they had a basic class consciousness. Lords also knew it, and their contempt for peasants was shot through with fear, of what the peasant majority might do if they organized, as Paul Freedman has shown.[15]

A third point is that there were other dynamic elements in medieval society whose economic impact has to be taken into consideration. Two particularly clear ones were the rise and fall of population, and the growth of states, both as autonomous recipients of surplus extraction and as rivals to lords in their monopoly of legitimate force and of juridical legitimation in general. Demographic change has been absorbed into Marxist explanation as an important and largely autonomous vector which affected the terms of class conflict. The late medieval state is less

[14] This is not uncontroverted: J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, CT, 1990), argues that they always did.
[15] P. Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford, CA, 1999).

fully theorized in this respect, but important beginnings have been made by a range of historians, from Perry Anderson to John Haldon and Larry Epstein.[16] Of course, the fact that all these socio-economic elements *can* easily be absorbed into a Marxist explanatory framework—with the exception of gender, perhaps—is not the whole point; as important is that non-Marxist historians do not see the need to do so, and regard them as largely separate phenomena, with independent roots, even if engaged in constant mutual interaction. Historians can of course make their interpretative choices as they like here. But I would argue once again that this pluralism has not established a paradigm of interpretation and explanation which is robust enough to offer an alternative to the Marxist schema. In the field of late medieval English history, Steve Rigby has in effect proposed one, as I have already said, based on the sociology of Parkin and Runciman; as an overarching description and analysis of socio-economic relations, this is very stimulating, not least because it extends into several of the areas (including gender) where Marxism is weak. All the same, Rigby is better at characterizing a system than at showing what its internal dynamics of change were.[17] It is as a dynamic model, in particular, that the Marxist paradigm still dominates historical assumptions.

One of the important features about the Brenner debate was that it already encapsulated all these issues at once, as Robert Brenner happily laid claim to all the different elements of interpretation of late medieval European history available in 1976 in the name of a Marxist grand theory of class conflict, and of property relations deriving from that conflict, as the main motor of socio-economic change. This was exciting then and retains its excitement now, not least because it involved a wide-ranging comparative analysis (unlike the responses of most of its critics, even when they hit the target).[18] Over twenty-five years later, critics still think Brenner worthy of attack, while others use his model as a guide for their own research, including in regions he did not discuss in detail (I think of Bas van Bavel's recent work on the Rhine delta, for example).[19] A crucial element of Brenner's arguments is that he refused a pluralist approach: he argued explicitly that the dynamic of class conflict was *the* prime mover

[16] P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1974); J. Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London, 1993); Epstein, *Freedom and Growth*. It is worth stressing that Anderson's book, together with *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London, 1974), still marks the boldest attempt to create a Marxist grand narrative of world history (sadly unfinished).

[17] Rigby, *English Society*.

[18] See above, note 1.

[19] B. J. P. van Bavel, 'Land, Lease and Agriculture', *Past and Present*, CLXXII (2001), pp. 3–43.

of the European economy. This is what made some people upset; it was that much harder to seek a consensual middle ground. But it did have the merit of making clear that Marxist explanations could indeed claim to dominate the field of economic analysis, however complex that analysis had by then become, without attempting to airbrush the complexity away. If combative political disagreement about the medieval economy faded away shortly after Brenner published his first article on the subject, it at least ended on a high note.

To summarize so far: medieval socio-economic historians of both the Left and the Centre-Right have retreated from explicit political stances into wider pluralist interpretative models; but in doing so, they have in my view left standing the main lines of a Marxist paradigm of the feudal economy and of its dynamic, pretty much unchallenged. The bulk of innovative recent work in this area has focused on commercialization and proto-industrialization in Europe, both in the late middle ages and in the early modern period; this has been matched by parallel analyses for India and China which argue against any obvious European economic privacy before as late as the eighteenth century, which certainly undermines the teleological edge of any argument about the economic trends of three centuries earlier and more. These arguments in themselves are powerful, but they have not contributed so much to changing our explanations for the growth of capillary exchange and proto-industry, which continue, implicitly, to lie in the power relations between peasants and lords. This seems to me to remain correct; but it also means, conversely, that these structural underpinnings have not so often been revisited by historians, despite the importance of recent empirical work. This seems to me the major task currently facing us: to develop our views of the dynamism inherent in the feudal economy in the light of the large amount of new work on production and exchange. I will finish, then, by talking about three aspects of this challenge: the problem of teleology; the utility of a substantivist version of Marxism; and recent attempts to characterize the nature, the logic, of the feudal dynamic.

The teleology of the development from feudalism to capitalism was present in Marx, and has been dominant in all strands of economic history which discuss European (or English) 'exceptionalism', as I have already noted. Such teleologies seem to me to distort the complexities and openness of real historical processes, and, in particular, end up privileging one set of economic patterns as the bearers of development, and condemning other sets as 'stagnant' or 'blocked', in value-laden and (often) unpleasantly triumphalist ways. They are also empirically unfounded. It can easily be argued that the feudal mode of production dominated in Asia as

much as Europe, and favoured similar sorts of economic structure.[20] The work of historians like Frank Perlin for India and Kenneth Pomeranz for China show the complexity and dynamism of some parts of early modern Asia (unfortunately parallel work is lacking for Egypt), and I would broadly agree with them that there is nothing obviously different about the development of Europe in the same period that marks the latter out for industrial capitalism but not the former.[21] Indeed, if one focuses on regional economies, the parallels become still closer, and many of the most economically complex regions of Europe in 1600, say, with a dense proto-industry linked to an interregional exchange in agricultural products (south Germany, for example), did not build on this and develop industrial capitalism any more than China did.[22] For that matter, even in England, arguments for the unusual, future-directed, structure of that kingdom's economic development in the early modern period would be more fully convincing if it had been its most complex economic regions, Suffolk or Gloucestershire, which were the eventual cradles of capitalism, rather than relatively marginal zones in 1600 like the hinterland of Manchester.[23] Overall, it seems to me that all the main centres of economic activity in Europe and Asia around 1600 could be described as 'high-level equilibrium' systems, with a considerable dynamism, specialization, mercantile investment, interregional exchange complexity, but without any pressing need to change their fundamental economic structures.[24] In the

[20] For example, Wickham, *Land and Power*, pp. 46 ff. (with pp. 74–5).

[21] F. Perlin, 'Proto-industrialization and Pre-colonial South Asia', *Past and Present*, XCVIII (1983), pp. 30–95; K. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton, NJ, 2000). Perlin sat at the start of a substantial revaluation of the pre-colonial Indian economy: for a recent synthesis of its final period, see P. Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy* (Cambridge, 2001). Pomeranz has already generated a good deal of critical attention, for example by P. C. C. Huang, R. Brenner, and C. Isett in *Journal of Asian Studies*, LXI (2002), pp. 501–38, 609–62, and P. Parthasarathi in *Past and Present*, CLXXVI (2002), pp. 275–93; my choice here of a cut-off date of 1600 is designed to cover myself with respect to the eighteenth-century focus of the argument.

[22] S. Ogilvie, *State Corporatism and Proto-industry* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 212–24; eadem, 'Proto-industrialization in Germany', in eadem and Cerman, *European Proto-industrialization*, pp. 118–36, at pp. 131–6.

[23] See, for the Manchester area, A. P. Wadsworth and J. de L. Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600–1780* (Manchester, 1931), pp. 3–28; J. T. Swain, *Industry before the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester, 1986), who talks up early small-scale industry; J. K. Walton, 'Proto-industrialization and the First Industrial Revolution', in P. Hudson (ed.), *Regions and Industries* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 41–68. I am grateful to Pat Hudson for bibliographical discussion here.

[24] For 'high' or 'high-level equilibrium', see T. Raychaudhuri, 'Mughal India', in idem and I. Habib (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, I (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 261–307, at p. 307. The phrase is also found in the form 'high-level equilibrium *trap*', which reintroduces

end, some would change and others would not, but not for reasons that were significant or even apparent in 1600 or, as it currently seems, even later.

Marx's teleology, then, is one element of his theories that I would wish to abandon. Marx's implicit substantivism, however, is a crucial element. Classical economics presumes that economic choices are identical in all socio-economic systems and that, if economic actors systematically make different choices from those predicted, then they are 'constrained', by legal restrictions, or by traditional mentalities and attitudes (such as family strategies) which are even now often posed as 'irrational'. Karl Polanyi in the 1940s counterposed to this a very stark alternative, known subsequently as substantivism, in which he denied the applicability of classical economics (above all price theory) to pre-industrial systems. This view has been influential in particular among social anthropologists, attuned as they are to the complexity of determination of all choices, and hostile as they are to any imputation of irrationality to the societies they study.[25] Polanyi and his successors were too stark; attempts to cut supply–demand calculations entirely out of the study of non-capitalist societies have tended to fail. But Marx's analyses of the economic logic of capitalism have at least analogous implications, for he made it clear that they were dependent on *capitalist* property relations, exchange, and investment strategies; there would be no reason to presume that any specific element of that capitalist logic was present in a different mode of production, where all the ground rules were different—it might be so, but you would have to show it. 'There is no exclusive economic rationality', as Maurice Godelier put it.[26] Marx made no study of the economic logic of feudalism, but he laid the intellectual groundwork for subsequent historians to do so, independent of the presuppositions of how economies work which derive from the societies we ourselves live in.

Here lies the core of the challenge, however; for we do not yet have a fully worked-out study of the internal logic, and the dynamism, of the feudal mode. We have partial accounts, of course, some very interesting.

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the idea of blockage: see M. Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (London, 1973), pp. 313–14, following R. P. Sinha. I have eliminated that. Robert Brenner's emphasis on the essential stability of dynamic feudal-mode systems, discussed in Chapter 4 of this volume, fits with these observations, although he puts more stress on early movements towards change in England and the Netherlands.

[25] K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 2nd edn (Boston, MA, 1957), esp. pp. 43–55; idem *et al.* (eds), *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Glencoe, IL, 1957), esp. pp. 243–70; G. Dalton, 'Economic Theory and Primitive Society', *American Anthropologist*, LXIII (1961), pp. 1–25, among many.

[26] M. Godelier, *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics* (London, 1972), p. 317.

Witold Kula in 1962 set out one of the most ambitious we have, based on sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Poland, in which among other things he reread Ernest Labrousse's theory of short-term cycles in Marxist terms, with a rigour and elegance which still strikes the reader. It has to be said that Kula's detailed proposals work really well only in specific forms of feudal society—such as the Polish one, where rent was in kind, and where peasants thus had little access to the commercial sector; but lords had much more access, for Poland, however internally uncommercialized, was closely tied into the pan-European grain market. But his systemic aims remain striking for all that.[27] So do those of Guy Bois, based on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Normandy, who focused on long-term tendencies; he argued among other things that, given peasant control of the productive process, there was a general trend of the level of rent to fall, particularly in periods of global growth, since lords had to make a special effort to increase rents and dues in order to reverse that trend, and this was less necessary if total lordly income was anyway going up—although in periods of crisis lords certainly did respond by increasing rents (and states, in parallel, increased taxation too). As long as they managed to impose them on resisting peasants, Robert Brenner would reply—and rightly, because the core underpinning of a Marxist interpretation will always remain the conflict between peasants and lords over rent. Bois and Brenner indeed argued sharply about this general issue in the framework of the Brenner debate. But in retrospect it is not hard to see them as opposite sides of the same coin, for any cyclical logic inside the feudal mode would have to be read through conflict as well. Brenner's more structural model of the feudal mode, presented in this volume, seems to imply that convergence of basic views in itself. It can be added that Bois' most controversial assertion, that feudal rent tends to fall, has growing empirical support in studies of rent levels in England around 1300, though more work needs to be done on the implications of this. It is in this set of changing relationships, between lords and peasants in periods of long-term and short-term agrarian growth and crisis, that a more comprehensive theory of feudal economic choices will eventually lie.[28]

[27] W. Kula, *Teoria economica del sistema feudale* (Turin, 1970). See further on short-term cycles, P. Vilar, 'Réflexions sur la "crise de l'ancien type"', in *Conjoncture économique, structures sociales: Hommage à E. Labrousse* (Paris, 1974), pp. 37–58.

[28] Bois, *Crisis of Feudalism*, pp. 393–407; idem, 'Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy', and R. Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', in Aston and Philpin, *The Brenner Debate*, pp. 107–18, 213–327 (the latter at pp. 242–64); Brenner in this volume. For England, see note 13 above. L. Kuchenbuch's and B. Michael's important sketch of an ideal type of a feudal economy, 'Zur Struktur und Dynamik der "feudalen" Produktionsweise im

These are elements of an interpretation of agrarian economic logic, but it is increasingly clear that rent is only one element in most versions of the feudal economy, even if always the main one. By the thirteenth century, many peasants were also wage earners, often already in artisanal (soon, proto-industrial) sectors, and all of them, at least in western Europe, had much more access to the exchange economy than did their later peers in Kula's Poland. 'Up to a point, feudalism thrived on trade', as Larry Epstein has said, and he goes so far as stating that economic growth under feudalism depends on strong states cutting back the barriers to, and therefore the costs of, trade.[29] This seems as empirically dependent on late medieval western European conditions as Kula's models were on Polish conditions; but as a proposal for a refinement of the economic model to encompass commercialization and many aspects of proto-industrialization theory it is again powerful. But what was the ultimate motor of that commerce? It could here be argued that it was the needs of the lords, taken as a group, who controlled such a high percentage of the non-subsistence income of every feudal society. Lords did not just need luxuries; they needed all kinds of artisanal and agrarian goods for their entourages, and, as lords got richer, their collective demand allowed urban and artisanal specializations to develop, and interregional agrarian exchange networks too. The commercial aspect of earlier eleventh- and twelfth-century (and even early medieval) growth was already related to lordly demand along these lines, as well as to seigneurial interest in the extension of at least local exchange so that lords could tax it. Overall, if peasants dominated the basic structures of production, lords dominated the basic structures of exchange. But the wealth of lords, as ever, depended on their ability to extract rents from peasants, by whatever coercive means the socio-political system allowed them at any given time. The articulation of commerce and industry, in the feudal world, depended directly on the ways in which rent was extracted, and the two must be analysed together.[30]

This is not an economic model, nor even a sketch of a model. An adequate characterization of the logic of the feudal mode of production would have to encompass most of the history of the world, for the feudal mode was lived by most of the world's population before the last century, and lasted for millennia in many places: proposals for how specific

vorindustriellen Europa', in iidem (eds), *Feudalismus: Materialen zur Theorie und Geschichte* (Frankfurt, 1977), pp. 694–761, spends only a few pages on the dynamic of the economy (pp. 750–60), picking up largely on Bois' empirically based model.

[29] Epstein, *Freedom and Growth*, pp. 38–72, 147–74 (p. 50 for the quote).

[30] C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 693–824, develops these points for an earlier period. See also Brenner in this volume.

elements of the economy related to each other would have to be tested, not only in early modern Poland and late medieval western Europe, but in the Roman and Carolingian empires, in Tang China, in Mamluk Egypt, in Mughal India. We would need a very generic model to do that, as well as more specific versions for more restricted periods and regions, which could then be assessed comparatively (something which is even now relatively rarely done). But, if we got that far, we would have a powerful tool for understanding the basic structure of socio-economic relationships, in the whole period from the rise of landownership to the appearance of industrial capitalism: of how they changed, but also of when and why they did not need to, which was most of the time. Marxist theory can contribute here to understanding medieval history better, but also in going well beyond it.

Note. I am grateful to Chris Dyer and Larry Epstein (who died, tragically, while this volume was in proof) for critiques of this chapter, and to several of the conference participants for ideas.

4.
Property and Progress: Where Adam Smith Went Wrong

ROBERT BRENNER

Ahistorical Materialism

The Dominance of Smithianism

During most of the first half of the twentieth century, there was widespread, if not unanimous, agreement that the way to understand the historical emergence of economic development in the West was through the theoretical lens provided by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. As everyone knows, according to Smith, the growth of output per capita takes place by way of the expansion of the market. This leads to the search for the gains from trade, leading to specialization and the increase of the division of labour, as well as capital accumulation, which together make for rising efficiency, the increase of productivity. There ensues a pattern of self-sustaining growth by way of the invisible hand . . . at least so long as the economy is unfettered by rent-seeking states or other such parasitic entities.

Working with this framework, the Smithian historians of the earlier generation took as their point of departure what they called feudal economy, which they understood as natural economy, or production for use—literally no trade. Feudalism had emerged, as they saw it, as a result of exogenous shocks, when a series of invasions—by the so-called barbarians, then the Muslims, and finally the Vikings—disrupted the great trans-Mediterranean trade routes that had long nourished the European economy, going back to Roman and Greek times. Agrarian Europe, and especially the lordly manors that constituted its basic cell structure, was thus thrown back into self-sufficiency and, as a consequence of the resulting decline of specialization and the division of labour, a long period of stagnation.

Against the background of feudal autarchy and non-growth, economic development was once again unleashed by the re-establishment of

precisely those same long-distance trade routes linking Europe with the eastern Mediterranean. This was the initial rise of the market, and it provided the basis for the initial growth of the division of labour, focused on merchant-led towns. Great industry grew up in those towns, notably in northern Italy and the southern Netherlands, supplying manufactures to the trans-European market for luxuries and military goods that had formerly been procured in the eastern Mediterranean or beyond—a kind of import substitution. After that, the call of urban markets brought about the transformation of the countryside, as feudal lords reorganized their estates in a capitalist direction in order to produce and sell more effectively to the towns. So, especially as feudal lords, absolutist states, and mercantilist governments lost their capacity to prey on production and fetter growth, the economy proceeded from medieval commercial revolution, to early modern agricultural revolution, to modern industrial revolution.

The foregoing story was, in fact, pretty much the same one that Adam Smith told in *The Wealth of Nations*, Book III, which is largely devoted to the rise of capitalism. A narrative of extraordinary power, it was taken up by such ideologically and politically diverse thinkers as Henri Pirenne, the liberal Belgian historian, and Paul Sweezy, the American Marxist economist. The picture it painted was one of more or less unilineal progress, driven by the growth of trade.

The Rise of Malthusianism–Ricardianism

Nevertheless, although this is sometimes today forgotten amid contemporary celebrations of the market, Smithianism hardly went unchallenged. From the late 1930s, and especially from the late 1940s, the discovery of the demographic factor, the role of population, completely transformed the economic historiography of the medieval and early modern periods. For the next three decades, roughly through the 1970s, Adam Smith was left in the shade by Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo. Of course, the newly emergent demographic interpreters in no way denied the extraordinary growth of trade and towns that took place in medieval and early modern Europe. This had been definitively established by the great Smithian historians of the first half of the twentieth century. What the demographic interpreters did call into question was the ability of trade and towns to bring about, in any automatic way, economic development, in the sense of the growth of labour productivity or per capita output.

Demographic historians such as M. M. Postan thus noted that, in later medieval Europe, rural regions experiencing the greatest impact of the growing urban market sometimes responded to the opportunity to

exchange by tightening rather than loosening serfdom, opening the way to economic stagnation. Postan referred to the strengthening of villeinage in the Thames Valley, in the shadow of London, in thirteenth-century England. The classic case was of course East Elbian Germany and Poland, where neo-serfdom emerged in tandem with the rise of international trade in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Commerce thus opened the way to neo-feudalism which made for underdevelopment. In an analogous manner, other demographic historians like E. Le Roy Ladurie pointed out that, while the growth of urban demand offered peasants the opportunity for increased income, there, too, the outcome was generally the opposite of economic growth. Peasant involvement in the market was accompanied by subdivision of holdings, intensification of labour rather than rising investment, and falling labour productivity . . . this leading not to economic growth, but to agricultural involution.[1]

In the end, the demographic interpreters accomplished nothing less than to replace the Smithian picture of unilineal progress resulting from the gains of trade with the Malthusian pattern of cyclical stagnation driven by demographic growth. Roughly speaking, in this perspective, population was seen, à la Malthus, to grow geometrically, output only arithmetically. As population grew, peasants were obliged to occupy ever worse land and to break up holdings, which brought about declining land–labour and capital–labour ratios. The inevitable outcome was declining output per person, meaning declining labour productivity. As a consequence, the increased demand for food and land, driven by rising population, outran supply, undermined by weakening productivity, and there followed the famous Ricardian pattern of factor prices. Food and land prices rose relative to the prices of labour and manufactures. Landlords and farmers did well at the expense of workers and town artisans. Increasing poverty was an unavoidable accompaniment. Ultimately, of course, population hit a ceiling, which was enforced by famine, disease, and late marriage. There was then just the opposite pattern: falling population, relatively cheap food and land, relatively high manufacturing prices and wages.

As Postan and Ladurie, as well as other great demographic interpreters like Wilhelm Abel of Germany, showed, European history from

[1] M. M. Postan, 'The Chronology of Labour Services', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4, XX (1937), pp. 192–3; E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc*, 2 vols (Paris, 1966), I, p. 8.

1000 through 1700 and beyond was understandable in terms of two great demographic cycles, ultimately driven by population increase and declining agricultural labour productivity:[2]

> *Phase A.* Population rise from 1100 to 1300 leads to the Great Famine of 1316–17, the Black Plague of 1348–9, the Hundred Years War—'The General Crisis of the Fourteenth Century'.
> *Phase B.* Population decline in later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries—'The Golden Age of Peasants and Workers'.
> *Phase A.* Population rise from 1450 to 1600 leads to a population ceiling, *c.*1600, trans-European warfare—'The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century'.
> *Phase B.* Population stagnation and decline in the later seventeenth/early eighteenth centuries.

The bottom line, especially with respect to the hitherto hegemonic Smithian paradigm, was that the Malthusian cyclical pattern of secular stagnation persisted throughout most of Europe, not just during the medieval period, but into the middle of the eighteenth century. So much for unilineal progress.

The Limits of Malthusianism–Ricardianism and Smithianism

Nevertheless, the Malthusian–Ricardian model had glaring weaknesses of its own, which were more or less the mirror opposite of those of the Smithian model. The Smithian historians had a great deal of difficulty explaining why the spectacular, long-term growth of commerce and urban industry had failed to elicit the sustained growth of agricultural productivity and failed to overcome long-term economic stagnation throughout most of Europe before the industrial revolution—hyper-commercialized, industrialized, and urbanized Flanders being a telling case in point. But, by the same token, the demographic interpreters were unable to explain why, from various points during the early modern period, their model ceased to hold in certain limited but critically important regions of Europe, despite continuing population increase. Thus, as virtually everyone recognized, from the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, the economies of England and the northern Netherlands began an epoch-making process of what turned out to be self-sustaining Smithian growth.

[2] M. M. Postan, 'Medieval Agrarian Society in Its Prime: England', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, I, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1966); Le Roy Ladurie, *Paysans de Languedoc*; W. Abel, *Agricultural Fluctuations in Europe: From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (London, 2006).

In both places, the expansion of trade was accompanied by a profound deepening of the division of labour in agriculture and industry; the spectacular accumulation of land and of capital; and, ultimately, the acceleration of technical change. From this point onward, in these two places, the growth of output per capita was never again stymied by the growth of population, which continued—indeed radically accelerated—right through the nineteenth century. Simply put, the Smithians could not explain persistent stagnation in most of Europe through the middle of the eighteenth century; but the Malthusians could not explain the take-off into sustained growth in England and the northern Netherlands during the late medieval and early modern periods.

Posing, or Failing to Pose, the Problem of Economic Development

By the mid-1970s or the early 1980s, the great historiographical conquests—and failures—of Smithianism and Malthusianism–Ricardianism had more or less clearly posed the fundamental conceptual and historical problem that had to be dealt with by economists and historians, if the field was to move forward. The challenge was to resolve, conceptually and empirically, the following two closely interrelated questions:

1 Why was it that over six or seven centuries—from around 1050 to 1750—despite the impressive growth of towns and trade, most of the European economy was characterized by two successive grand Malthusian demographically driven cycles, marked by falling labour productivity in agriculture?
2 Why was it that, at different points in the later medieval and early modern periods, in the face of ongoing, indeed accelerated demographic increase, a few economies of Europe achieved a breakthrough to self-sustaining growth?

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the economic historiography failed to confront this issue, and has, for the most part, continued to ignore it right up to the present. Indeed, far from the transcendence of the dual legacies of Smithianism and Malthusianism, we have had instead a return—I would call it a regression—to Smithianism pure and simple. By the middle of the 1990s, as the turn to neo-liberal market opening became ever more pervasive on a world scale and as the US economy experienced the supposed miracle of the New Economy, the rise of the market was once again being nearly universally regarded in the economic historiography of Europe and beyond as the automatic driver of economic growth, so long as there were no political barriers preventing

this. Economic historians were once again finding so-called 'Smithian growth' everywhere they looked.[3]

Now, in my opinion, this revival of Smithianism has been achieved only by way of massive historiographical amnesia and with major intellectual costs:

1 The first of these costs is that the pervasive demographic cum economic patterns discovered by the Malthusian–Ricardian historians have been allowed to simply fall off the radar screen. In particular, there has been a failure to come to grips with, and a continuing inability to account for, the prevalence of the Malthusian–Ricardian pattern of prices and income distribution throughout most of Europe right into the period of the industrial revolution, even in the face of the huge stimulus of urban demand.
2 The second is what I would call a forced homogenization of the pattern of historical development in medieval and early modern Europe. Since it was undeniable that trade and towns expanded impetuously throughout much of medieval and early modern Europe, it was, once again, simply assumed that this *must have* generated economic growth; that economic growth was, if not universal, at least the rule rather than the exception. Historians have therefore papered over the truly enormous divergence, during the early modern pre-industrial epoch, in the processes of growth between the dynamism experienced by the Anglo-Dutch economies and the Malthusian–Ricardian stagnation that prevailed almost everywhere else in Europe.
3 Finally, in what seems to me a fit of exuberance that I will let others call irrational, historians of China, and other places in Asia, have not only found enormous evidence of the growth of trade in their regions, which is quite irrefutable, but they have also gone on to draw what seems to me the quite unfounded conclusion that this increase in exchange brought about economic development, in the sense of rising per capita output and rising labour productivity. Indeed, led by Ken Pomeranz and the so-called California school, a new group of historians of China has refurbished and revised the old theory of capitalist sprouts and is arguing that, up to 1800,

[3] See B. M. S. Campbell, 'Progressiveness and Backwardness in Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-century English Agriculture: The Verdict of Recent Research', in J.-M. Duvosquel and E. Thoen (eds), *Peasants and Townsmen in Medieval Europe: Studia in Honorem Adriaan Verhulst* (Gent, 1995); G. Grantham, 'Contra Ricardo: On the Macroeconomics of Pre-industrial Economies', *European Review of Economic History*, II (1999).

economic growth had proceeded as dynamically and as far in the Yangzi Delta as in England.[4]

It is my view that all of these historiographical trends simply elide the fundamental questions posed by dual legacy of Smithianism and Malthusianism in the historiography, which I frame in the following manner:

1 In theory, or in general, what determines whether the Malthusian or the Smithian pattern of economic evolution will prevail at given times and places?
2 More concretely, or historically, what determined the divergent historical patterns of development within Europe during the medieval and early modern periods—the persistence of Malthusian stagnation throughout most of continental Europe through 1750, the take-off meanwhile to sustained growth in England and the northern Netherlands from various points between 1450 and 1600?

Adam Smith's Decisive Contribution and Its Critique

Smith's Theory of Economic Growth as a Necessary Point of Departure

In any attempt to understand economic development, Adam Smith must remain the indispensable point of departure—the place to start, if not to conclude. This is because Smith both captured the *essence* of modern economic growth and discovered what might be called the *key mechanisms* responsible for its taking place. Smith's genius was, in my view, to locate the essence of modern economic growth in the generalized adoption, all across the economy, of certain specific forms of individual economic behaviour—the adoption of a certain approach to economic life on the part of economic agents as standard. Modern economic growth thus takes place where, and because, the economy is constituted by individuals who, as the norm, seek systematically to maximize profits by means of cost-cutting through ever deeper specialization, the systematic reinvestment of surpluses, the obsessive adoption of the latest technique, and the movement of means of production from line to line in response to changes in demand.

[4] K. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ, 2000); R. Brenner and C. Isett, 'England's Divergence from the Yangzi Delta: Property Relations, Microeconomics, and Patterns of Development', *Journal of Asian Studies*, LXI, 2 (May 2002).

For Smith, then, the *differentia specifica* of modern economic growth or economic development is not constituted by any once-and-for-all technological breakthrough, such as the rise of the factory or the adoption of inanimate power that one finds at the heart of modernization theory (as in Ernest Gellner). Nor is it, again, the rise of towns and of the town–country division of labour (emphasized by Henri Pirenne), or indeed the emergence of that interregional or international division of labour at the core of world systems theory (developed by Immanuel Wallerstein). Nor is it, in itself, that 'original accumulation of capital' which has, from time to time, featured in latter-day 'Smithian' accounts of development—be this derived from the gold and silver mines of the Americas, the African slave trade, or whatever. All these things could—and sometimes did—contribute to an already ongoing process of economic development, but they could in no way constitute it or bring it into being. What distinguishes modern economic growth, as Adam Smith observes, is something much more general and abstract: it is the presence in the economy of a systematic, continuous, and quasi-universal drive on the part of individual direct producers to cut costs via specialization, capital accumulation, and the transformation of production in the direction of greater efficiency.

What, then, is it that accounts for the effective generalization throughout the economy of this form of individual economic behaviour? Smith provides two basic mechanisms:

1 In the first instance, individuals specialize because they find it in their self-interest to do so, in order to secure the gains from trade. Because the gains to be had from specialization in the thing one does best are better than the returns from diversifying so as to produce everything one needs for subsistence, economic agents choose the former over the latter.
2 In the longer run, in order to successfully specialize, individuals find that they have to further break up tasks, to accumulate capital and innovate so as to bring in the latest technique, because this is the only way they can survive in competition. So, there is a process of natural selection that makes for the prevalence of low-cost producers by weeding out high-cost producers.[5] The upshot is that, for

[5] '[G]ood management . . . can never be universally established, but in consequence of that free and universal competition which forces every body to have recourse to it for the sake of self defence': A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols (Oxford, 1976), I, pp. 163–4.

> Smith, modern economic growth occurs because what individual economic agents find to be in their self-interest and what they are compelled to do in order to survive under the pressure of competition turns out, or just happens, to fit the requirements for economic development to take place in the economy as a whole. The particular choices individuals are inclined to make and that are selected out by the system turn out, or just happen, to bring about, in the aggregate, sustained economic growth. This coincidence is, of course, what Smith is capturing with his notion of the invisible hand.

Transcending Smith and Malthus: An Alternative Approach to Development

The foregoing contributions of Smith seem to me the necessary place—indeed, the only place—to begin. For economic development, in the sense of the sustained growth of output per capita or labour productivity, will take place, as Smith showed us, *only* (1) where the individuals constituting the economy find it systematically in their self-interest to maximize the gains from trade, *and* (2) where competition weeds out high-cost low-profit units. Nevertheless, it also seems to me that there is a very major problem entailed, which was left unresolved by Adam Smith. Contrary to what Adam Smith seems to have supposed, individuals or families will not always find it in their self-interest to allocate their resources or means of production so as to maximize the gains from trade, even when they have the opportunity to do so. Nor will high-cost, low-profit productive units always be weeded out by competition in production. On the contrary, these things will happen, only under certain quite specific, and historically limited, social conditions. Where Adam Smith thus fell short—to put it most generally—was in presenting his basic mechanisms as if they held universally, or, more precisely, in failing to specify the socio-economic conditions under which his mechanisms making for economic growth did and did not hold.

It is at this point that historical materialist theory and history come into their own. For historical materialist approaches offer a way to resolve and thereby transcend the problems in the ahistorical perspectives of Smith and Malthus–Ricardo.

Most fundamentally, historical materialist approaches begin from a denial of any notion of trans-historical individual economic rationality. The contention is that, contra not only Smithians but also Malthusians, the specific forms of socio-economic behaviour that individuals and families will find to make sense and will choose will depend on the society-wide network of social relationships—society-wide constraints

and opportunities—in which they find themselves. These constraints present themselves to individual economic agents as unchangeable givens, because they are sustained by collective socio-political action. The upshot is that every historically evolved type of society—what Marx called mode of production—has its own microeconomics.

Social-property relations. What will determine an economy's microeconomics—i.e. what individuals will find it makes sense to choose—is the macro-structure, what Marx called relations of production, and what I will term social-property relations. I prefer social-property relations to the more standard relations of production for two reasons. First, the term social relations of production is sometimes taken to convey the idea that the social structural framework in which production takes place is somehow determined by production itself, i.e. the form of cooperation or organization of the labour process. This I think is disastrously misleading. Second, I think it is necessary not only to lay bare the structuring or constraining effects of *vertical* class, or surplus extraction, relations between exploiters and direct producers, which is generally what is meant by social relations of production. It is, if anything, even more critical to bring out the structuring or constraining effects of the *horizontal* relationships among the exploiters themselves and the direct producers themselves.

Social-property relations, as I would define them, are thus the relations among direct producers, relations among exploiters, and relations between exploiters and direct producers that, taken together, make possible/specify the regular access of individuals and families to the means of production (land, labour, tools) and/or the social product per se. The idea is that such relations will exist in every society and define the basic constraints on—the possibilities and limits of—individual economic action. They form the constraints because they define not only the resources at the disposal of individuals but also the manner by which individuals gain access to them and to their income more generally. They define the resources at the disposal of individuals and the manner by which individuals gain access to them and to their income more generally because they are maintained or reproduced collectively, that is beyond the control of any individual, by *political communities* which are constituted for that very purpose. It is because political communities constitute and maintain the social-property relations collectively and by force—by executing the political functions that we normally associate with the state—defence, police, and justice—that individual economic actors cannot as a rule alter them, but must take them as a given, as their framework of choice.

Rules for reproduction. It follows that, in view of the specific set of historically given social-property relations that prevails, the society's individuals and families can be systematically expected to adopt a particular corresponding set of economic strategies—or what I would call rules for reproduction; for, in light of the possibilities and limits set by the social-property relations, those strategies or rules make the most sense. We can therefore say that the social-property relations determine the rules for reproduction.

Developmental patterns. Finally, since, given the prevalence of certain given social-property relations, people can be expected to make the choice for certain given rules for reproduction, it follows that when those choices are made in aggregate, they give rise to certain corresponding overall developmental patterns, which Marx called, a bit pretentiously, laws of motion. Put another way, by asking what is the consequence of everyone following the economy's rules of reproduction—everybody doing it, so to speak—one can discern or adduce the economy's basic secular economic trends.

So, the causal chain runs from historically specific, politically reproduced social property relations to individual rules for reproduction to aggregate developmental patterns to society-wide forms of crisis.

It seems to me that a decisive advantage of this approach is that it allows one—indeed, obliges one—to clearly distinguish between, and sharply pose, two very different issues that tend to be run together by ahistorical approaches: that is to say, change *within* the system versus change *of* the system, or, alternatively stated, the evolution of a society of a given type versus the transition from a society of one type to a society of a qualitatively different type. From this standpoint, evolution *within* the system follows from the reproduction of the social-property relations, which continue to enforce the same rules for reproduction and in turn the same developmental patterns and forms of crisis. By contrast, a change *of* the system requires the transformation of the social-property relations, because only the latter results in the new rules for reproduction that are required for the installation of new developmental patterns and forms of crisis.

Towards an Historical Theory of Economic Development

From the foregoing discussion, a point of departure for constituting a theory of economic development naturally follows: namely to establish the

social-property relations under which the two Smithian mechanisms of growth either will or will not hold. Specified a little further, the problem is to flesh out the following series of basic propositions:

1 While economic development in the sense of the sustained growth of per-capita output simply cannot take place without the operation of Smith's two mechanisms of growth, those Smithian mechanisms will themselves function only where certain historically specific social-property relations prevail, and these I would call *capitalist* social-property.
2 By contrast, where pre-capitalist social-property prevailed—and this is, I would argue, throughout most of world history in both east and west and north and south—the economy will fail to develop and, more than likely, experience a Malthusian–Ricardian pattern of cyclical stagnation.
3 It follows that the key to the emergence of modern economic growth as characterized by Adam Smith was the onset of processes of transition through which pre-capitalist social-property relations were transformed into capitalist social-property relations. Such processes, for reasons I shall try to specify, were far from universal.

Capitalism

What, then, are capitalist social-property relations? There are two defining elements:

1 Economic agents must be separated from their means of subsistence. Though they may possess means of production—tools and skills—the individual economic agents cannot possess their full means of subsistence, i.e. all that is necessary to allow them to directly produce what they need to survive. What this usually means is that, at minimum, they must be deprived of ownership of land, or at least land that, when combined with their labour and tools, could provide them with everything they need to survive.
2 Economic agents must lack means of coercion that would allow them to reproduce themselves by systematically appropriating by force what they need from direct producers.

The idea here is simple and far-reaching, though not uncontroversial. It is that, unless they are devoid of their full means of subsistence (again not necessarily production) and the ability to secure their subsistence by

force from the direct producers, economic agents will not be *required* to buy necessary inputs on the market. Unless they are required to buy necessary inputs on the market, they will not be obliged to sell on the market in order to survive. Unless they are required to sell on the market in order to survive, they will not be subject to the competitive constraint, their very survival dependent upon their producing competitively. Unless, finally, they are subject to the competitive constraint, they cannot be expected to try to maximize their profits by seeking the gains from trade, so they cannot be counted on to specialize, accumulate, innovate, and move from line to line in response to demand. This last point is most essential, for what is implied is that the mere operation of self-interest on the part of individual economic agents in response to the opportunities provided by the growth of the market cannot be expected, let alone counted upon, to detonate self-sustaining growth. The bottom line is that Adam Smith's two mechanisms of growth will operate only where economic agents are not just *involved in*, but also *dependent upon* the market for their inputs and therefore subject to competition, and in addition where those same economic agents are unable to sustain themselves by recourse to forceful appropriation from the direct producers. It is the prevalence of the specific social-property relations that renders producers free and subject to the competitive constraint, having to produce competitively to survive, that makes for economic development. (See Table 4.1.)

Feudalism

In order to sustain the foregoing argument, it is necessary to prove a, rather large, two-pronged proposition: that is to say that, in the presence of pre-capitalist social-property relations, even given the substantial growth of opportunities to exchange, economic actors not only (1) found it individually sensible to adopt economic strategies or rules for reproduction that were incompatible with the requirements of economic development in the aggregate, but also (2) found it individually and collectively sensible to act in ways that maintained and strengthened those social-property relations. Despite the presence of market incentives, economic actors failed to find a strategy of price–cost maximization by means of intensified specialization, accumulation, and innovation to be in their individual self-interest or compelled by competition. Over time, therefore, output and income per person not only failed to rise with population, but often tended to fall. Even so, neither individuals nor groups could find it in their own self-interest to seek to transform the social-property directions in a capitalist direction.

Table 4.1. Capitalism (simplified or stripped down version).

Social-property relations	Rules for reproduction	Development patterns	Forms of crisis
• Direct producers own means of production but not full means of subsistence. • They are thus *dependent on the market.* • They are thus obliged to buy their inputs, in turn required to sell their outputs to secure the funds to buy their inputs, and so required to produce competitively in order to survive. • Economic agents lack the capacity to appropriate the means of their reproduction from the direct producer by force.	• maximize price–cost ratio, maximize profits; • specialize; • accumulate/ reinvest surpluses; • innovate: bring in latest invention; • move from line to line to meet changing demand.	• growth of labour productivity/ output per person, especially in agriculture; • capacity to support ever larger proportion of population out of agriculture; • rising real wage due to declining cost of food; • increase in discretionary spending (manufactures, services) leading to growth of domestic market; • increasing proportion of population in towns; • self-sustaining growth and end of Malthusian demographic ceiling.	

To put the matter crudely, it is my contention that the agrarian economies that came on the scene from the time of the origins of settled agriculture until the early modern period were, almost universally, structured by variants of a single broad type of pre-capitalist social-property relations, of which the form that prevailed in medieval and early modern Europe represented one particular example. This broad type of social-property relations can be understood as 'just the opposite' of capitalist social-property relations. Its widespread prevalence, I would contend, explains not only why, from the rise of settled agriculture until the early modern period, what might be called commercialization—the rise of trade, towns, and the urban–agricultural division of labour—was near universal, but also why, despite commercialization, non-development, and particularly the Malthusian–Ricardian form of non-development,

was also essentially universal. The transformation of pre-capitalist social-property relations in a capitalist direction—the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist social-property relations—was thus the key, historically, to the onset of modern economic growth. In the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to make sense of these propositions and to demonstrate their usefulness for understanding the evolution of feudalism in most of Europe from the eleventh century through the middle of the eighteenth century; the transition from feudalism to capitalism in parts of western Europe during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries; and the implications of the latter for the ensuing emergence of a new pattern of self-sustaining growth.

The Evolution of Feudalism in Medieval Europe

What, then, were the social-property relations that constituted the European feudal economy, and why did these systematically give rise to long-term patterns of non-development, despite nurturing the extensive development of commerce, urbanization, and the town–country division of labour?

Feudal Social-property Relations

Peasant possession. Like most agricultural societies since the origins of sedentary agriculture, European feudalism was constituted, at its foundations, by what I would call peasant possession. By this I mean that agricultural producers had direct access to factors of production—land, tools, and labour—sufficient to enable them to maintain themselves without recourse to the market. What made possible peasant possession was, in the first instance, villagers' self-organization—or the self-organization of leading villagers—in a conscious political community. This community ensured the maintenance of the position of each of its members as possessors by carrying out a series of functions that should, again, be identified as quintessentially political. It helped to establish rules for landholding and inheritance.[6] On occasion, it appears even to have helped organize defence of its members against outsiders. And it helped to settle disputes among its members concerning property and persons and to enforce law and order by carrying out justice and police functions. The upshot was that peasant possession—like virtually all private property under

[6] I say 'helped' in this context, for, where lordship was established, peasants in fact carried out these functions in collaboration with, and subordinately to, lords.

feudalism—was *politically constituted*, containing an irreducible political element: it was made possible by the political functioning of the peasant community, which endowed its members with the rights that gave them their possession of the means of subsistence, specifically their land. Beyond that, it was sustained by the paradoxical fact that lords could not, as a rule, find it in their own interests to separate their peasants from the means of subsistence.

Lordly surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion. Lords were not lords by virtue of being landowners, holders of demesnes (indeed, they did not always have demesnes). This was because peasants possessed their means of subsistence and so were under no compulsion to take up a commercial lease or hire themselves out as waged workers in order to survive. Lords could not, then, count on the availability of either commercial tenants or waged workers to valorize what demesne land they held, i.e. on an adequate market in labour power or leasers. As a result, they could not, as individuals, find it in their interest to expropriate the land possessed by their peasants because, having done so, they would find themselves with no one to turn to work on or lease their plots. This was, beyond the action of the peasant community, a further powerful factor contributing to the maintenance of peasant possession. The outcome was that lords could ensure their economic reproduction as lords, ideal-typically, only by appropriating part of the product of the peasant possessors by force.[7] In addition, because under feudalism, at least in its classical form, lords took a surplus in some sense individually—rather than collectively via some sort of centralized taxation—they always faced the problem of implicit competition among lords for peasants. What this meant was that successful surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion tended to require the exertion of some degree of control over peasants' lives, some restriction on peasant freedom, especially with respect to mobility.

What enabled lords actually to succeed in taking a surplus by extra-economic coercion was their constitution of self-governing political communities or states, however large or small. These communities made possible lords' application of force and, in that way, the performance of the set of key political ('governmental') functions that enabled lords to make regular, coercive transfers of wealth from peasants, as well as from

[7] As a consequence of the secular tendency for population to increase and for peasants to subdivide their holdings on inheritance, there was a long-term tendency for the size of some peasant holdings to fall below that required to provide their full means of subsistence. For this, and its implications, see below, pp. 78–80.

other lords.[8] They thereby established, and made possible the valorization of, lords' rights in peasants' product, so that, for individual lords, it was membership in such communities or states, with associated rights, that, in the last analysis, made them proprietors. Their property, too, was politically constituted.

The extensive coincidence of the processes of the constitution of political communities and the constitution of private property—of state formation and class formation—throughout the pre-capitalist epoch cannot be overstressed. Under feudalism, overlords could amass power—to insure their economic reproduction, as well as to carry out public governmental functions—only by constituting a political community. But overlords could constitute a political community only by effectively endowing followers with what I have just termed politically constituted private property—rights to an income, generally (but not exclusively) arising from rights in peasant wealth, derived classically from seigneurial jurisdiction over peasants and land or, alternatively, from offices financed out of taxation of peasants—or, less formally, from gifts or payments from the overlords. It was the lords' self-organization into a political community, under the leadership of the overlord, that made possible the application of the force that was the sine qua non both for the coercive redistribution of income and wealth by which individual lords maintained themselves at the expense of peasants and other lords, and for the simultaneous execution of the standard functions of government by those same lords. The lordly community made possible taxation—the taking of levies by individual lords from peasants—fundamentally for lords' personal use, but also to finance public services. It carried out justice and police functions, basically to protect lords' property rights by quelling peasant resistance and restricting mobility, but also to settle disputes among the lords themselves and to enforce law and order against unruly members of the lordly, as well as the peasant, community. It was responsible for military operations, fundamentally to make possible predatory ventures to take other lords' wealth, but also to allow for defence. State building, with the implied capacity to wield force, was thus necessary for the lords' surplus

[8] Because lordly political communities carried out the governmental functions we normally associate with states, while disposing of the means of force to make this possible, they should be understood as states, despite their multiplicity, their small size, their localized scope, and their property-constituting (surplus-extracting) function. This is not, of course, to deny that, even early on, some lordly states were unified and had jurisdiction over broad territories.

extraction and class domination, with the consequence that the lordly class, controlling the means of coercion, inevitably constituted the state.

Feudal Rules for Reproduction

The structure of social-property relations, reproduced by collectivities of lords and by collectivities of peasants, constituted the basic framework in terms of which individuals and/or families decided upon the best strategy for their economic reproduction. By examining how this worked out for feudal economic agents, we can lay bare the fundamental concrete, or specific, problems with the Smithian notion that the Smithian mechanisms of growth—specifically the pursuit of the gains from trade and operation of competition as constraint and field of natural selection—can be expected to operate irrespective of the reigning system of social-property relations. We can explicate, as well, the manner and degree to which production for the market did emerge and develop and lay bare the limitations upon its capacity to bring about economic growth either by transforming the reigning rules for reproduction or the system of social-property relations.

Peasants

Peasants tended to adopt the rule for reproduction 'produce for subsistence', the strategy of deploying their families' land, labour, and capital to produce directly all that they needed to survive, marketing only physical surpluses. They did *not*, that is, adopt the Smithian rule for reproduction, 'produce for exchange', specializing in what they did best, accumulating their surpluses, and adopting the latest technique. This is not to say that peasants did not *involve* themselves in trade—for of course they did, to a significant degree. Rather, it is to contend that they eschewed specialization and the resulting market *dependence*. How do we explain this, especially as it implies that peasants failed to seek all the gains from trade that were theoretically possible?

The preliminary, but nonetheless crucial reason why peasants selected produce for subsistence as their basic rule for reproduction is that they *could*, so long, of course, as they continued to possess the means of subsistence. Possession of the means of subsistence relieved peasants from the necessity to depend on the market for most of their inputs; it therefore shielded them from competition. They had what they needed to survive, so they did not have to go to market for essentials. Therefore there was no need for them to produce competitively in order to continue to make a go of it. Even if others might adopt a new cost-cutting technique, peasant

possessors did not have to. Failing to adopt a cost-cutting innovation that could bring down the price of their output would presumably reduce the returns peasants could net from selling their surpluses by reducing their market share or the return per unit of sales. But, since they did not depend on sales on the market for survival, this would not put them out of business.

But this still leaves unanswered the question of why peasants rejected production for exchange by means of all-out specialization. They might not have been compelled to seek the gains from trade in order to survive, but why did they not find it something they wanted to do anyway? After all, as Adam Smith proved, pursuing the gains from trade is the most efficient way to allocate one's labour, as well as capital and land, if one wishes to maximize exchange value from the goods or service one provides. Why did not peasants find it in their self-interest to do so? There can be no doubt that, like everyone else, peasants wanted to secure the gains from trade, to the extent possible, *all else being equal*. That, after all, was only rational. But the problem was that all else was not equal: for specializing to secure the full gains from trade jeopardized the attainment of other, overriding peasant aims.

We can thus pinpoint the fatal flaw of what might be called Smithian trans-historical micro-economics in the following way. While Smith brilliantly specified the *gains* that come from specialization for the market, compared to diversification for subsistence, he failed to demonstrate a trans-historical, or generalized, self-interest in specialization because he failed to consider and investigate the other side of the coin, i.e. the potential costs that could accrue or damages that might result from such specialization. Where Smith went wrong therefore was to neglect the potential *losses* from trade and to entertain the possibility that these might outweigh the gains from trade. Peasants in possession of their means of subsistence thus refrained from seeking the full gains from trade because the *trade-offs* entailed by specialization were too great. The problem was that specialization by definition meant market dependence; market dependence entailed subjection to competition; and standing up to competition required maximization of profits by minimization of costs. Nevertheless, for peasants what was required to maximize their price–cost ratio by minimizing costs was incompatible with the pursuit of other goals they could not sacrifice. What were these overriding goals and why was their realization incompatible with the maximization of the gains from trade?

'Safety first'. Peasants had, above all, to make sure of their supply of food. But, peasants could not count on a regular, adequate supply of food

through exchange. Bad harvests were common but unpredictable, tending to occur in bunches and to lead to 'crises of subsistence'. Such crises not only brought extremely high food prices over several years; simultaneously, because of those high food prices, they also brought reduced discretionary spending for most of the population, thus reduced demand and unusually low prices for non-essential, non-food items. Under these conditions, peasants who specialized in non-food crops would face the possibility—the precise probability of which they could not calculate—of finding themselves squeezed between the high costs of the inputs (especially food) that they had to purchase and the low returns from their output, and in serious danger of death from famine. Given the uncertainty of the harvest and the unacceptable cost of 'business failure'—namely the possibility of starvation—peasants could not afford to adopt maximizing exchange value via specialization as their rule for reproduction and adopted instead the rule of 'safety first' or 'produce for subsistence'. Again, this did not imply staying out of the market. It meant eschewing full-scale specialization leading to dependence on the production and sale of non-food crops (such as wine, flax, and the like) and instead diversifying so as to directly produce everything needed for survival and marketing only what was left over. It cannot be overstressed that agriculturalists' adoption of this non-Smithian strategy was conditional upon their possession of the means of reproduction; without the latter, peasants would have lacked their shield from competition; they would have been compelled to buy their inputs on the market; and thus had little choice but, in Smithian manner, to specialize so as to secure the gains from trade so as to meet the competition.

Having large families. Peasants had to secure insurance against illness and old age in a society in which there was no institution upon which they could rely for this outside the family. It therefore made sense to have as many children as possible, in order to insure that there would be some who survived long enough to be able to take care of them in case they were sick and when they got old. But they could not viably take this route and simultaneously choose to produce for exchange and thereby subject themselves to competition and the resulting pressure to maximize their price–cost ratio. This was because having and supporting additional children implied a reduction in the surplus of which the family could dispose for the long years in which those children were unable to bring in as much income as they cost to sustain. Peasants with large families who turned to specialization would thus find themselves at an intolerable competitive disadvantage. By contrast, producing for subsistence gave peasants sufficient insulation from the exigencies of market

competition, so they could secure social insurance in the only way available to them.

Subdivision of holdings as basis for social insurance, early marriage, and the perpetuation of the family line. Peasant possession gave them the effective right to subdivide their holdings and they tended to adopt this custom (even where primogeniture was the formal rule) almost universally, unless lords prevented them from doing so. In this way, they made sure that their (male) children actually had the capacity to provide care for them, and ensured the perpetuation of the family line. Subdivision also enabled peasants to respond to the demands of male children for the wherewithal to start families of their own and, indeed, provided the basis for early marriage, for lacking direct access to plots by inheritance (younger) sons would have had to spend a much longer time amassing the economic basis for forming a family. Nevertheless, like burdening the holding with many children, subdividing holdings, by reducing their size, naturally undercut their productive potential (unless they were extremely large to begin with). Adopting this rule for reproduction to secure highly valued goals of both parents and children was thus incompatible with market dependence and the exigencies of standing up to competition, and thus required avoiding specialization and pursuing a strategy of diversification—production for subsistence/safety first—to make it viable.

In sum, possession of the means of subsistence, by shielding peasants from the competitive constraint, permitted them to eschew potential gains from trade and to take the necessary steps to maximize their utility. Peasants' choice for diversifying to provide subsistence and marketing only physical surpluses expressed no economic irrationality, but represented the most sensible way to secure economic security, as well to pursue understandable non-economic goals, under conditions in which neither economic security nor those non-economic goals could be achieved in conjunction with market-dependent, competitive production. Peasant possessors could not take full advantage of the market by specializing because specializing meant market dependence; market dependence meant subjection to the competitive constraint; and achieving competitiveness was incompatible with diversifying so as to minimize the risk of death through starvation, the provision of health and old age insurance through having large families, and securing the capacity of their male children to establish the basis for their own material reproduction, so as to care for their parents, to marry, and to secure the family line. Peasants might seek some of the gains from trade by involving themselves

in the market, specifically by trading their physical surpluses, but they had to stop short of specializing and becoming dependent upon it.[9]

Lords

By virtue of their rights in their peasants' product, lords commanded non-market access to sufficient income to directly provision their households and secure their basic needs. They were thereby shielded, like peasants, from the requirement to produce efficiently on the market in order to stand up to economic competition in order to survive. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that feudal society was constituted by a multiplicity of separate, initially localized, lordly groups organized for the purpose of exerting force, politico-military competition was a fact of life. As a consequence, lords had little choice but to concern themselves with acquiring the wherewithal to engage effectively in warfare, as well as the conspicuous consumption that betokened their status. They therefore had every inducement to attempt to increase the income from their estates in order to purchase the military and luxury goods that they needed to sufficiently reward, equip, and expand their followings. What was the best way to do this?

Some lords lacked demesnes and depended for their income entirely on payments in money and kind from dependent peasants. But even those lords who held ample lands would face virtually insuperable barriers if they sought to increase their income by means of increased investment and innovation in agricultural production, given the nature of their relationship with the peasants upon whom they depended for their labour force. Because peasants possessed their own plots and laboured on lords' demesnes only under the threat of force, they had little incentive to make effective use of the improved means of production with which lords might equip them, and lords were of course in no position to fire them for their failure to do so. Deprived of the threat of dismissal, perhaps the best disciplinary device yet discovered to motivate careful and intensive work in class-divided societies, lords found the supervisory costs of securing satisfactory work too high to justify much agricultural investment or innovation. They therefore had to find alternatives to improvement if they wished to increase their income.

[9] The foregoing analysis is premised, of course, on peasants actually being able to maintain the means of subsistence, something it was not always possible for them to do. See below, pp. 78–80.

Extensive growth. Although they had minimal capacity to transform production so as to increase productivity, lords could increase output and income by opening new lands to agricultural production along already-existing lines. This might be achieved via simple assarting, the carving out of arable land from waste, or, more grandly, via colonization, the expansion of feudal economy into new regions. Either way, extending the area of cultivation was the lords' main form of productive investment and perhaps the best way of increasing their output, incomes, and capacity to buy on the market.

'Political accumulation'. In the absence of access to new land, lords had little means to increase their income except by improving their ability to redistribute wealth coercively from peasants or other lords. As a result, lords often found their most viable rule for reproduction to be what I call political accumulation. This entailed applying their surpluses to building up their military and political potential by constructing stronger—better armed, larger, and more cohesive—political communities to better dominate and control the peasantry and to more effectively wage war. Rather than systematically investing, they pursued an anti-growth strategy of compulsively consuming—namely systematically dispersing their money on military equipment to arm their feudal bands and on luxury goods to bring vassals around them and keep them there. State-building—by attracting more followers to the lordly political community, better equipping them with weapons, and enabling them to pursue a form of life that distinguished them as members of the elite—was, in the end, the sine qua non for lordly survival and prosperity.

It must be emphasized that lords' adoption of political accumulation as a rule for reproduction is inexplicable merely as one viable means for increasing lordly income. It was imposed upon lords by the structure of the feudal economy as a whole. Inter-lordly competition was thus the feudal analogue of inter-capitalist competition and it functioned like capitalist competition as a field of natural selection, weeding out those lords or groups of lords—i.e. lordly states—that could not stand up to military pressure, from the time in which feudal political communities tended to be small and rudimentary, right through to the era of huge, absolutist warfare states. Lordly groups therefore had no choice but to turn to political accumulation so as to build up their military potential merely for purposes of defence. At the same time, under conditions where it was difficult to extend production, conquest and plunder might very well prove the most cost-effective way to increase income.

Feudal Developmental Patterns

It was the generalized adoption by individual lords and peasants of the rules for reproduction imposed by feudal social-property relations that lay behind long-term patterns of feudal development. By grasping the progression from feudal social-property relations to feudal rules for reproduction to feudal forms of growth and feudal forms of crisis, it becomes possible to understand the general lines of feudal evolution across Europe as whole. Of course, though partaking of a common trajectory, different regions took paths that differed from one another in important respects. These divergent paths were crucial in determining divergent long-term outcomes, to which it will be necessary to return.

Population growth. Peasants' proclivities to have large families and subdivide holdings facilitated early marriage and relatively low levels of celibacy. The latter made for relatively high fertility and, in turn, rapid population growth. All across the European feudal economy demographic increase accelerated from some time in the eleventh century and, virtually everywhere, brought about a doubling of population before the end of the thirteenth century.

Colonization. The only method by which the feudal economy could achieve real growth was by opening up new land for cultivation. Economic development in feudal Europe may thus be understood, at one level, in terms of the familiar race between the growth of the area of settlement and the growth of population. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, feudal Europe was the site not only of dynamic efforts at assarting, i.e. scratching out new arable land from forests and wastes. It was also the scene of great movements of outward expansion by settler-colonizers. The latter were often organized and led by lords, who pushed eastward across the Elbe, conquered the Iberian Peninsula, and would, eventually, reach out from Portugal and Spain across the Atlantic to the Americas. But, in certain instances, the colonization process was undertaken by peasants, notably in the case of the reclamation of land from the North Sea, to constitute much of what was to become the northern Netherlands.

Limited growth of the productive forces and declining productivity of labour. As population grew and peasants subdivided holdings, the material foundations for improving production—indeed of peasant production itself—were progressively weakened. Agriculture had to be extended to land that was less fertile and/or more costly to bring under cultivation. Holdings got smaller, and the ratios between land and

labour and capital and labour diminished. Because the man–land ratio steadily increased, yields tended to grow. But this growth of output per unit of land was an expression of, and was purchased at the cost of, a decline of output per unit of labour. To make matters worse, as peasant plots got smaller and they yielded ever less food, peasants were obliged to transfer to arable production land previously devoted to the support of animals, the key source of the manure that was required to keep the land in heart. But this naturally undermined soil fertility, accelerating the decline of agricultural labour productivity that overshadowed every aspect of feudal economic evolution.

The peasants' approach to agriculture tended to preclude the ongoing improvement that would have been required to counter the tendency to declining output per person. Shielded from competitive constraint, peasants lacked an overriding incentive to develop new techniques or systematically to adopt existing ones. At the same time, their choice of production for subsistence as their fundamental rule for reproduction limited the specialization that was usually a prerequisite to technical advance. It was not that peasants were resistant to technological change per se. For example, over the course of the medieval period, they adopted progressively larger and better ploughs. Still, the introduction of new techniques tended to take place as a once-and-for-all occurrence, not an ongoing self-sustaining process.

The underlying problem was that a high degree of market dependence was required to bring in the technical improvements that really could have made a difference, those that would come to constitute 'the new husbandry'. The latter was largely about creating a more symbiotic relationship—to replace the age-old conflict—between arable and animal production and was highlighted by the integration of fodder crops (clover, sainfoin, turnips, etc.) into new rotations. The increased cultivation of fodder crops could allow for the support of larger numbers of beasts for ploughing, hauling, and manure. Meanwhile, as a consequence of the nitrogen-fixing properties of the fodder crops themselves, it would directly contribute to the fertility of the soil. But the fact remains that, although apparently well known in several parts of Europe in the medieval epoch, these improvements generally were not systematically integrated into rotations until the early modern period due to peasants' resistance to the high degree of specialization and reliance on market sales that they entailed.

The problem of limitations on specialization was compounded by the small size of peasant plots, which tended to grow ever smaller. In basic grain production, a family labour force could on its own cultivate a farm

of 35 acres, or even 50 acres or more, especially if it had the help of seasonal labour at harvest time.[10] But the majority of peasants often appear to have lacked plots even half that size, i.e. around the minimum needed to provide for a family's subsistence.[11] The outcome was that peasant agriculture was unable to allocate its supply of labour efficiently, specifically meaning that there was a great deal of disguised unemployment in the dominant, grain-producing agriculture. The resulting pressure on peasant family incomes and waste of potentially productive labour constituted an enormous fetter on the growth of peasant productiveness. Peasants' tendency to have many children and to subdivide their holdings among their sons obviously worsened this problem, especially as peasants' parcellization of plots tended to overwhelm the tendency to the build-up of sufficiently large holdings in the agricultural economy as a whole.

Part and parcel of the same syndrome, peasants often lacked not only the land, but also the capital, needed to produce grain effectively—especially through investing in animals, as well as in farm infrastructure. Surpluses were small, and access to credit highly restricted. And the difficulties were of course exacerbated over time, as population grew, wealth was divided, and collateral disappeared.

Finally, individual peasant plots were, most often, integrated within a village agriculture that was, in critical ways, controlled by the community of cultivators. The peasant village regulated the use of the pasture and waste on which animals were raised, and the rotation of crops in the common fields. Individual peasants thus tended to face significant limitations on their ability to decide how to farm their plots and thus on their capacity to specialize, build up larger consolidated holdings, and so forth.

Feudal state-building. In the face of its limited potential for increasing agricultural output, and under pressure from the inter-lordly politico-military competition that was built into the feudal structure of decentralized coercive surplus extraction, the lords tended to find that investing their surpluses so as to increase the size and sophistication of their political communities, or states, was an indispensable means to ensure their survival and increase their wealth and power. This was especially because inter-lordly competition for peasants, intensified by the lords' need for additional peasant cultivators to valorize newly reclaimed land, as well as inter-lordly disputes over jurisdictional rights within villages, tended to

[10] R. C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 57–8.

[11] Data on the size of peasant plots are all too scarce. This generalization is based on evidence from later thirteenth-century England (in the great survey, the Hundred Rolls), as well as English and French studies of individual lordly estates.

provide the peasantry with major openings for playing lords off one against one another, as well as for resistance, thereby limiting the lords' take. It was also because that same inter-lordly competition constituted a field for natural selection, which, over time, increasingly favoured those lords able to improve their politico-military capacity, in much the same way as inter-capitalist competition composed a field for natural selection that favoured those units able to improve their techno-productive capacity.

This is not to say that a high level of lordly organization was always required. Nor is it to argue that state-building took place as an automatic or universal process. On the eastern frontier of European feudal society, colonization long remained an easy option, and there was relatively little internally generated pressure upon the lordly class to improve its self-organization. At the same time, just because stronger feudal states might become necessary did not always determine that they could be successfully constructed. But the fact remains that, to the degree that they remained internally disorganized, lordly groups would tend to be that much more vulnerable not only to peasant resistance and flight that could undermine their capacity to take a surplus, but to depredations from the outside that threatened their very existence. The evolution of the feudal mode of production, over the course of the medieval and early modern periods, was therefore characterized by the prevalence, in every region and across Europe as a whole, of ever larger and more powerful political communities or states.[12]

The expansion of the market and the growth of towns. The immediate expression of lordly political accumulation leading to the growth of ever larger and more powerful lordly political communities or states was the growth of exchange and the rise of towns. The lordly class needed ever more, and more sophisticated, weaponry and luxury goods (especially fine textiles) to respond to intensifying intra-feudal politico-military competition. The growth of exchange made possible the rise of a circuit of interdependent productions in which the manufactures of the towns, produced in response to the demand of the lords, were exchanged for peasant-produced necessities (food) and raw materials, appropriated by the lords and demanded by the town population.

In this nexus, both artisan industrial producers and merchant intermediaries were of course central, but it should be emphasized that they were

[12] This is not of course to deny the converse, viz. that relatively strong states could be found in every feudal epoch, even quite early on, as for example in Anglo-Saxon England.

not, typically, either capitalists or proto-capitalists. Like peasants and lords, urban industrial producers depended upon political communities for their politically constituted private property, and found membership in these communities the sine qua non for their economic reproduction. Especially in the face of the precariousness of the medieval food and other markets, artisans were thus obliged to organize themselves into gilds which had as their chief purpose securing their members' income by reducing the uncertainty of market production through constituting a shield against competition. In order to keep prices up, gilds limited entry, enforced production standards, and restricted output. As a consequence, though innovations of course took place from time to time, artisan-dominated industry displayed little of the tendency to self-sustaining specialization, accumulation, and innovation required for dynamic industrial growth.

Merchants found themselves in a position roughly analogous to that of artisans. Merchants' profits depended upon their ability to buy cheap and sell dear and therefore required political regulation of trade for their sustenance. This was because, without controls over entry and quantities traded, competitive processes would tend to force the purchase price up and the sales price down until they equalized one another. Merchants, too, therefore—like lords, peasants, and artisans—depended for their reproduction upon their organization into political communities, specifically privileged companies. To be effective, the latter needed charters that could be backed up politically and forcefully, and so almost always had to be issued by the prince or leading aristocrats. Like virtually all other feudal actors, merchants found that their private property and economic reproduction had an irreducibly political aspect. Indeed, the best way for merchants to increase their profits was, very often, to strengthen their companies' trading privileges.

The restricted scope of commercialization and the town–country division of labour: limited growth of the non-agricultural labour force and of the domestic market. Commerce, merchants, and towns were thus in no way external to the feudal economy; on the contrary, because they responded directly to the requirements for lords to carry out their rules for reproduction, they were integral to its functioning from the very start. Great industrial and commercial cities emerged in Flanders and northern Italy from the tenth and eleventh centuries on the basis of their industries' ability to capture a preponderance of the demand for textiles and armaments emanating from the lordly class of Europe as a whole. In turn, they placed ever-greater pressure on commercialization in the countryside. But the fact remains that both the social-property relations in agriculture and the character of the town–country division of labour put strict limitations

not only on urbanization but the degree to which the growth of towns could stimulate the response of agricultural production.

The trend to declining labour productivity in agriculture tended to lead naturally to declining agricultural surpluses per agricultural worker and therefore to put strict limits on the potential for growth of the relative size of the non-agricultural labour force and, specifically, of towns. At the same time, because peasants had only limited ability to make market purchases, the growth of lordly demand constituted the main driving force for urban industrial and commercial expansion, but it too was limited by the size of the agricultural surplus. During the whole of the medieval and early modern periods through 1750, throughout most of western Europe the non-agricultural population as a proportion of the total failed to grow, while that of the towns increased at best from 10 per cent to 12 per cent.[13]

The growing weight of unproductive production. In the first instance, the growth of the town–country social division of labour within feudal society benefited lords, for it reduced costs of production through increasing specialization, thereby making military and luxury goods relatively cheaper. Nevertheless, in the longer run, it meant the growth in the size of the economy's unproductive sector at the expense of its productive one. On the one hand, feudal levies were used to pay for the output of the growing urban centres, thus on military goods and luxury consumables, but neither of the latter flowed back into the productive process as means of production or means of consumption for the direct producers. On the other hand, as lords succeeded in increasing their unproductive consumption by improving their ability to redistribute income away from the peasantry coercively, they further limited the agricultural economy's capacity to improve, for increased levies reduced peasants' disposable income, and thus their ability to support themselves as the agricultural labour force or to make greater investments in tools. So, if the growth of towns depended on agrarian surpluses and tended to increase the demand for agricultural output, it also further constricted the capacity of agriculture to support it.

[13] R. C. Allen, 'Economic Structure and Agricultural Productivity in Europe, 1300–1800', *European Review of Economic History*, III (2000); J. de Vries, *European Urbanization 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1984). The conclusion on the share of the urban labour force in the total during the medieval period depends on extrapolating back to that era the findings of de Vries for the early modern period.

The Malthusian–Ricardian pattern of relative prices and the growth of poverty. Because agricultural labour productivity declined as population increased, the evolution of the feudal economy was marked by a distinctive evolution of relative prices that expressed its fundamental nature. As the number of persons grew, demand for food and land to provide food naturally grew correspondingly. But, because output per person declined, demand outran supply, tending to drive up the relative prices of both food and land. At the same time, because food prices rose, income available for discretionary expenditures declined. As a result, the demand per person for non-necessities, notably manufactured goods, declined, even while manufacturing productivity avoided the declining productivity that gripped agriculture, with the consequence that the relative prices of manufactures fell. Meanwhile, as the potential labour force grew, even as the economy's dynamism decreased, real wages tended to fall. This, in combination with the decline in the size of peasant plots, meant that the rate of poverty inexorably increased.[14]

The (partial) commercialization of peasant agriculture, the rise of proto-industry, and the increase of land productivity at the expense of labour productivity. The ultimate result of the long wave of demographic expansion leading to subdivision of holdings was to leave a significant part of the peasant population, by the thirteenth century, first without agricultural surpluses and ultimately with insufficient land to provide fully for its subsistence. A greater proportion of the peasantry than ever before was rendered at least partially dependent upon the market. Nevertheless, (usually partial) market dependence for these peasants led not to any breakthrough toward modern economic growth, but an intensification of the long-term trends toward stagnation and decline. Increasing numbers of peasant plots could not support their possessors, but peasants had little choice but to cling to them, because they provided an indispensable contribution to their livelihood. This was especially because, due to the structurally limited size of the non-agricultural labour force, as well as the restricted employment opportunities offered by towns dominated by artisans organized in privileged gilds and merchants organized in privileged companies, the economic alternatives available to peasants outside of agriculture were minimal. Under the pressure of population increase, growing numbers of peasants thus found themselves

[14] Postan, 'Medieval Agrarian Society in Its Prime: England', pp. 549–65; H. E. Hallam, 'Population Movements in England, 1086–1350', in idem (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. II: *1042–1350* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 508–93; J. Z. Titow, *English Rural Society 1200–1350* (London, 1969), pp. 64–96; D. L. Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', in Hallam, *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. II, pp. 716–817.

'stuck' on the land, while their demand for means of support beyond their own plots increased as the size of their holdings decreased. Peasants had little choice but, in one way or another, to accept decreasing living standards and increasing exploitation or 'self-exploitation', in order to survive.

Peasants who had insufficient land to provide their subsistence directly but who had commercial access to urban markets could seek to make ends meet by making more intensive use of family labour—not only their own but also, especially, that of their wives and children. All else being equal, peasants in this position would have devoted their additional labour to the production of food grains, for, in the face of food prices that rose with population increase, this would have brought the best returns (so long as the demographic upturn continued). But the problem was that increasing labour inputs in food grain production quickly brought sharply declining increases in output (rapidly falling marginal returns to labour). Peasants were therefore obliged to fall back on the cultivation of such 'labour-intensive' commercial crops as flax, dyes, and garden vegetables, as well as legumes and sometimes fodder crops. They might turn, as well, to domestic industry organized by town or rural merchants. Still, to follow this path, peasants had to pay a heavy price. Because the pressure on peasants to pursue the production of specialized crops or domestic manufacturing was accompanied by rising food (grain) prices, both commercial agriculture and proto-industry yielded ever smaller returns per unit of labour input than did wheat, so always represented a decrease in the cost-effectiveness with which peasants allocated their major resource. Put another way, although commercial crops and domestic manufacture yielded increased output and income per household or per unit of land—rising land productivity—it did so only at the cost of a further decrease in output per unit of labour—declining labour productivity. The peasants' turn to commercial agriculture and proto-industrialization should not therefore be understood, in Smithian fashion, as a voluntary attempt to secure the gains from trade in response to growing market opportunities, but rather as a second choice, made under duress, as the only way to survive in the face of insufficient land to cultivate food grains.

Whereas intensifying labour could not, after a point, raise yields for grain, it could long continue to raise yields for many non-grain commercial crops, although perforce at the cost of declining output per unit of labour input. This was the classic route to peasant 'self-exploitation'. Peasants with insufficient land to secure their subsistence either directly or through commercial sales were obliged to lease additional land at a

commercial rent or to hire themselves out as agricultural labourers or go into domestic manufacturing. But their having to do so offered lords, richer peasants, and merchants unprecedented opportunities, for it provided them with an ever-increasing supply of effectively captive labour. With no other place to go, semi-landless peasants had to intensify their labour and reduce their living standards to the extent necessary to secure a lease or employment. Lords and wealthier peasants could therefore secure the best returns from their land by spending money on the employment of additional peasants rather than on improved means of production and by leasing land to peasants obliged to produce with the goal of family survival, rather than to larger farmers aiming to make a profit. Merchants made the same choice in organizing domestic manufacture. Simply put, peasant families' capacity and necessity to intensify labour and accept lower returns per unit of labour input made substitution of labour for capital the optimal way to improve lordly and merchant income.[15]

In sum, under the pressure of an ever higher man–land ratio, precisely in order to continue to 'produce for subsistence', peasants were, paradoxically, obliged to turn ever more intensively to the market—to commercial agricultural and industrial pursuits. But, because they did so by necessity rather than by choice, they not only failed to secure the gains from trade that would have accrued to them had they had plots of sufficient size to continue to produce and sell surpluses in food grains, but suffered declining productiveness and declining living standards in the process. The implication for the economy as a whole was that during the thirteenth and the first part of the fourteenth century—and in the feudal economy's 'up' phases of demographically driven expansion more generally—increasing commercialization and proto-industrialization represented no step toward development, but an aggravation of ongoing economic involution. In the words of Slicher van Bath, the rise of intensive husbandry and, we might add, of proto-industrialization 'was not a picture of wealth, but of scarcely controlled poverty . . . The cause was . . . the necessity to eke out a living for an increased and dense population', under conditions where peasants had no other options.[16]

[15] B. M. S. Campbell and M. Overton, 'Productivity Change in European Agricultural Development', in Campbell and Overton (eds), *Land, Labour and Livestock* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 30–2.

[16] B. H. Slicher van Bath, 'The Rise of Intensive Husbandry in the Low Countries', in J. Bromley and E. H. Kossman (eds), *Britain and the Netherlands* in *Europe and Asia* (London, 1968), p. 15. Proto-industry 'should [thus] be viewed as an autonomous response of an area

Feudal forms of crisis

The long-term process of extensive growth—powered by demographic growth, and overlaid by the intensification of political accumulation leading to the growth of feudal states which supported ever larger, parasitic urban centres—had, in the last analysis, to lead to predictable forms of crisis.

Malthusian crisis. Given declining labour productivity, population growth faced unavoidable limits, and, all over Europe, from various points in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, there was increasing evidence of overpopulation and the letting up or actual ceasing of population growth. In this situation, all else being equal, there should have been a simple Malthusian adjustment in which demographic decline—via famine, disease, and later marriage—brought population back into line with available resources, opening the way for a new phase of demo-economic expansion. But this straightforward homeostatic mechanism could not take effect because the operation of the feudal economy encompassed a balancing not merely of peasants' requirements for subsistence with the potential output of medieval agriculture, but of lords' requirements for political accumulation with the peasants' potential aggregate surplus.

Crisis of seigneurial revenues. Because the lords' growing needs for military and luxury consumption were ultimately determined by the growing requirements of inter-feudal competition in an epoch of increasingly well constructed feudal states and ever more costly warfare, the lords could not easily adjust their demands downward to the declining capacity of the underlying agricultural population to meet them. While the slowdown of population growth of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries thus meant the deceleration of pressure on the available resources, it also meant a slowdown in the growth of the number of rent-paying tenants and so thereby a deceleration in the growth of lordly rents. To maintain sufficient politico-military potential, lords sought to compensate for the slowdown in the growth of their income by increasing their demands on the peasantry, as well as by initiating military attacks upon, so as to

trapped in a cycle of relative overpopulation and the ensuing parceling out of agricultural land and pressure on agriculture income, coupled with the inability of the surrounding towns to absorb emigration from the countryside': H. van der Wee, 'Industrial Dynamics and the Process of Urbanisation and De-urbanisation in the Low Countries from the Late Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century: A Synthesis', in idem (ed.), *The Rise and Decline of Urban Industries in Italy and the Low Countries (Late Middle Ages–Early Modern Times)* (Louvain, 1988), p. 347.

redistribute income from, one another. Peasants were thus subjected to increasing rents and the ravages of warfare at the very time that their capacity to respond had been severely weakened, and this led to population stagnation and decline. The particularly sharp reduction in population that followed upon the famines and plagues of the fourteenth century brought major reductions in lordly revenue leading to sharply increased lordly demands—resulting in a downward spiral of rising exploitation, increased inter-lordly military conflict, and declining population that was not reversed in many places for more than a century. The lordly revenue crisis and the ensuing seigneurial reaction thus prevented the normal Malthusian return to equilibrium. A general socio-economic crisis, the product of the overall feudal class-political system, rather than a mere Malthusian downturn, gripped the European agrarian economy until the middle of the fifteenth century.[17] (See Table 4.2.)

The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

Conceptualizing the Transition to Economic Development

If feudal social-property relations, so long as they were maintained by lordly and peasant political communities, tended to make for the adoption of certain rules for reproduction on the part of individual lords and peasants and, for that reason, certain aggregate or economy-wide developmental patterns and forms of crisis, the question that obviously arises in attempting to understand the breakthrough from Malthusian–Ricardian stagnation to Smithian self-sustaining growth is how to understand a transition from the feudal mode of production to an economy in which economic agents systematically adopt capitalist rules for reproduction. The Smithian approach clearly faces profound difficulties in even recognizing this problem, let alone resolving it. This is because its fundamental premise is that, in response to the opportunities offered by the rise of commerce, individual economic agents can, more or less trans-historically, be expected to find it in their economic interest to seek the gains of trade by specializing, and, beyond that, accumulating surpluses and innovating, thereby detonating an ongoing process of economic development by way of the invisible hand. From that point of departure, it is difficult to take on board the idea that a system of social-property relations, sustained by the

[17] For these dynamics, and their instantiation in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Normandy, see G. Bois, *Crise du féodalisme: Économie rurale et démographie en Normandie orientale du début du 14e siècle au milieu du 16e siècle* (Paris, 1976).

Table 4.2. Feudalism.

Social-property relations	Rules for reproduction	Development patterns	Forms of crisis
Reproduced by peasant political community			
• peasant possession of the means of subsistence, i.e. land, labour, and means of production sufficient to maintain themselves.	• produce for subsistence (also called 'safety first'), i.e. diversify to produce everything needed, marketing only surpluses • have large families • subdivide holdings • marry early.	• population growth • ever smaller holdings • movement onto worse land • little specialization or investment • declining labour productivity (Malthusian pattern) • rising food and land prices, falling real wages and prices for industrial goods in Phase A (opposite in Phase B) • restricted home market due to peasant production for subsistence and minimal growth of labour productivity, keeping food prices high and discretionary spending low • home market dominated by demand by lords • limited population out of agriculture, in towns.	• over-population leading to fall in population.

Table 4.2. continued

Social-property relations	Rules for reproduction	Development patterns	Forms of crisis
Reproduced by lordly political community			
• lordly exaction by extra-economic coercion, i.e. forceful taking of feudal rent. This is exploitative, because labour, rent, or money is taken from peasants without compensation and without peasant choice (non-contractual).	• political accumulation, i.e. use levies from peasants to build larger, more cohesive, better armed political groups, or feudal states • expand area of settlement, either through bringing more land into cultivation (assarting) or through colonization, i.e. extending feudalism to new regions.	• opening up of new lands, expansion • ever larger feudal states • growing demand for military and luxury goods • growth of trade and towns (as expression of lordly demand for military and luxury goods) • growth in unproductive expenditures.	Feudal crisis • population falls • lordly income falls • lords tax peasants and take from other lords through war (to compensate for falling incomes) • population falls, as peasants face increased levies at same time they are already suffering from falling incomes and as production is disrupted by war • a downward spiral.

collective action of class-based political communities, might create incentives for individuals to adopt economic strategies that, though individually sensible, turn out, in aggregate, to be subversive of economic growth. The explanatory tactic that Smithianism broadly speaking has therefore been obliged to pursue is to understand changes in social structure, or social-property relations, as taking place in the same way as other economic changes—specifically, as the aggregate result of the piecemeal initiatives of individual economic agents, acting at the micro-level, so as to maximize profits of their economic units, in this case, by reorganizing their units' structure of property so as to increase their cost-effectiveness in much the same manner as they might reorganize their units' structure of production itself, in accord with factor prices and/or the availability of new techniques.

In a series of famous passages in *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith offers what has turned out to be the classic instantiation of this approach, so as to account, in effect, for the historical transition from feudalism to capitalism in England. In Smith's scenario, the starting point is the appearance of merchants from the towns at lords' estates, offering for sale to lords 'baubles' hitherto unavailable (but quite irresistible) to them. Lords, who were previously limited in what they could consume by the prevalence of the natural economy, are motivated to respond by attempting to rationalize their estates so as increase their income. First, they dismiss their very costly retainers as *faux frais* of production, free their peasants, and kick most of those same peasants off their plots. Then, they offer the best-off among the latter, presumably on a competitive basis, commercial leases to farm larger, consolidated plots that the landlords have built up and brought together. The upshot, in aggregate, of this same process, taking place manor by manor across the economy, is the rise, de facto, of capitalist farming in England.[18]

It should nevertheless be more or less self-evident that Smith can accomplish this conceptualization only by failing to take seriously the existence of feudal social-property relations as constraints on the actions of individual economic agents. Only in this way can he conceive of the transformation of social-property relations as taking place as the result of initiatives taken at the micro-level and presumed to generalize themselves economy-wide. If it were admitted that, as in medieval England, peasants actually possessed the land, the rationality of a lord dismissing his retainers would be hard to credit, for, without them, how could a lord have ensured the forceful domination over his peasants that he needed in

[18] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book III.

order to exploit them by taking part of their product without recompense—let alone to separate them from their plots? But, even assuming that the individual lord could have successfully accomplished the liberation then expropriation of his peasants, it is hard to understand why he would have found it in his interest to do so, in view of the fact that, given the prevalence of feudal social-property relations, the economy that surrounded him was constituted by other feudal lords capable of exerting extra-economic controls over their peasants and peasants who themselves possessed their means of subsistence. Given those social background conditions, in which an individual lord was unable to have recourse to already-existing well developed markets in tenants or workers, to whom could the lord have expected to turn in order to farm his estate? He could hardly have relied on his just-expropriated peasants to remain in the neighbourhood. But, even if the latter had been willing to stick around and to come back and work for the lord, the lord would have found himself in a very poor bargaining position to lease to or to hire them, given the lack of competition for tenancies and jobs.

The steps that Smith has his individual lord undertake would of course have made sense on the premise that the society-wide transition to capitalism had already been completed—i.e. the lords as a class had ceased to be able to take a rent by extra-economic coercion and the direct producers had already been separated from their means of subsistence and been reduced to market-dependent tenants; in other words that the former were already capitalist landlords, owners of the land, able to access a developed market in tenants. But to adopt this premise would obviously be to take for granted the existence of what it is necessary to account for. If, by contrast, one gives credence to peasant possession and lordly exaction by extra-economic coercion as the givens of the feudal social-property system, sustained on a system-wide basis by the collective action of communities of lords and peasants, one would have to conclude, as did a range of non-Smithian historians from M. M. Postan to Maurice Dobb, that, to best respond to increased opportunities to market the product of their estates, individual lords would have attempted to strengthen their grip on the peasantry so as to extract more from them in a feudal manner. Rather than detonating a transition to capitalism, the ensuing process could very well have led to a strengthening, and epochal extension in time, of the feudal mode of production—and clearly did so across north-eastern Europe, in East Elbian Germany and Poland, during the later medieval and early modern periods.

In recent decades, historians have tended to accept that, in the presence of feudal lordship, the rise of trade cannot be counted to set in train

a process of transition. A number of them have made, however, the equally Smithian argument, that, once lordship had been overcome, individual peasants could be expected to set off the transition to capitalism by way of a process of social differentiation. In this vision, larger peasants, taking advantage of presumed economies of scale, beat out, on the market, smaller and less effective producers. In turn, the former then emerge as a rural bourgeoisie, the latter fall into the ranks of the rural proletariat, and the former hire the latter, instantiating the rise of capitalism.[19]

But, as with the scenario presented by Adam Smith, this process, envisioned by latter-day Smithians, must assume that the transition to capitalism has already taken place in order to successfully explain it. In the presence of peasant possession, larger, more efficient peasants can, by virtue of their greater productiveness, take a greater share of the market at the expense of their less-well-off counterparts, but they cannot put them out of business, appropriating their assets and reducing them to the ranks of the proletariat. This is, again, because the latter are shielded from competition by their direct, non-market access to all the inputs they need to reproduce their families. As a result, wide swathes of the economy are impenetrable by the standard processes of capitalist natural selection, and potentially capitalist peasants can find only a limited market at best for proletarians to hire and/or commercial tenants to lease their land to. In individual cases, peasants might buy land from others so as to build up larger holdings. Nevertheless, this could not easily happen on an economy-wide basis, since peasants' possession of their land was the foundation for their economic reproduction, and they had few alternative ways to make a living. For that reason, peasants would not easily part with their holdings, and, as a consequence, land prices tended to be driven up disproportionately. In any case, given the overriding tendency for peasants, large and small, to turn to 'safety first', to have large families, and to subdivide holdings on inheritance in pursuit of economic security, social insurance, and the extension of the family line, parcellization of land could be expected to outrun agglomeration. Of course, where direct agricultural producers are already separated from their means of subsistence—not necessarily the means of production—a process of

[19] See, for example, M. Dobb, 'From Feudalism to Capitalism', in R. H. Hilton (ed.), *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1976), and P. Croot and D. Parker, 'Agrarian Class Structure and the Development of Capitalism: France and England Compared', in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985). Cf. R. Brenner, 'Dobb on the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, II (1978).

social differentiation can unquestionably be expected to take place rather rapidly in the presence of the market, because those producers are not just involved in the market but dependent upon it. As a consequence, not only is profit-maximization necessarily the economic norm, but natural selection is enabled to take place by way of competition. But to make reference to such a process to account for the transition is once again to explain the rise of capitalism by assuming its existence.[20]

Nevertheless, if the problem, at bottom, with Smithian approaches is their taking for granted the prevalence of a capitalist social-property system and capitalist economic agents pursuing capitalist economic goals to explain the rise of capitalism, the question that immediately imposes itself with respect to the approach I have adopted here may be seen to be just the opposite. In view of the strong system-maintaining bias that I have, explicitly and implicitly, attributed to the operation of systems of social-property relations in general and feudal social-property relations in particular, how can a transition to capitalism ever be expected? Not only have I argued that, so long as feudal social-property relations were maintained, peasants and lords would find that it made sense to adopt the same rules for reproduction, leading, in aggregate, to the same economic tendencies to non-development and the same forms of socio-economic crisis. But I have implied as well that, insofar as either lords or peasants had anything to say about it, feudal social-property relations *would* in fact be maintained, for peasants and lords sustained their own political communities precisely with the purpose of constituting, reproducing, and strengthening to the maximum extent possible peasant possession and surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion, respectively. The unavoidable conclusion is that, even were either lordly or peasant collectivities entirely successful in realizing their aims against the other, they would bring about continuity not qualitative change. Lords would install even tighter feudal controls over the peasants in the interest of greater exactions by extra-economic coercion; peasants would put an end to lordship and secure untrammelled peasant property and the capacity to take the

[20] It is true, of course, that, as population rose, ever greater numbers of peasants found themselves with insufficient land to make ends meet and thus to an increasing extent dependent upon the market. But, as has been stressed, in this situation lords, merchants, and the peasants themselves found it made sense to pursue not greater capital accumulation and improvement but, on the contrary, greater squeezing of the direct producers by taking a greater share of their product and by impelling greater intensification of labour. The commercialization of agriculture and proto-industrialization that resulted from demographic increase and subdivision of holdings did not therefore lead to capitalist development but to agro-industrial involution. See above, pp. 78–80.

full fruits of their labour. But the upshot in either case would not be the transition to capitalism but the strengthening of pre-capitalist social-property relations. Since I began with the contention that the sine qua non for economic development was precisely the separation of the producers from their full means of subsistence (though not necessarily production) and their freedom from any structure of surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion, a question imposes itself. How could the system of feudal social-property relations ever give way to a system of social-property relations that was essentially its opposite?

It seems to me that there is only one logical answer: insofar as breakthroughs to modern economic growth occurred, these must be understood to have taken place as the *unintended consequences* of actions either by individual lords or peasants or communities of lords or peasants seeking to reproduce themselves as feudal-type actors in feudal-type ways. In other words, the emergence of capitalist social-property relations resulted from attempts by feudal individual actors to carry out feudal rules for reproduction and/or by feudal collectivities to maintain feudal social-property relations, under conditions where seeking to do so had the unintended effect of actually undermining those social-property relations. Only where such transformations occurred did economic development ensue, for only where capitalist social-property relations emerged did economic actors find it made sense to adopt the new rules for reproduction imposed by the new system of social-property relations.

In the remainder of the chapter, I give some historical and conceptual substance to the foregoing, rather abstract, stipulations as to how to understand the transition from feudal non-development to modern economic growth by carrying out the following two tasks corresponding to the two prongs of my argument:

1. To begin to explicate and instantiate my contention that the rise of capitalist social-property relations must be understood as an unintended consequence of the pursuit of feudal goals by feudal actors, I elucidate the divergent responses made by lords and peasants to the late medieval socio-economic crisis in different regions of Europe, and how, during the subsequent, early modern epoch, these gave rise in some parts of Europe to the maintenance of some form of feudal social-property relations, but brought about in other parts of Europe the emergence of capitalist social-property relations.
2. To begin to substantiate my thesis that the rise of capitalist social-property relations was the sine qua non for economic development, I attempt to show that, in those regions where some form of

feudal social-property relations was maintained during the early modern period, there ensued a process of non-development cleaving closely to the path of Malthusian–Ricardian secular stagnation familiar from the medieval period; while, in those regions where capitalist social-property relations were installed, there were breakthroughs to self-sustaining growth.

The Crisis of Seigneurial Incomes and Its Results: The Restructuring of Feudalism Versus the Rise of Capitalism

From the emergence of banal lordship in the tenth and eleventh centuries, out of the disintegration of the Carolingian empire and the gradual devolution of power to ever more localized political units, peasants sought to resist lordly demands and to secure full control over both their persons and their holdings, to reduce or eliminate feudal rent.[21] This much is generally acknowledged. But less well understood is the extraordinary degree to which peasants actually succeeded in realizing their goals during the subsequent centuries. The peasants' capacity to stand up to lordly pressure stemmed from their ability to exploit a fundamental weakness built into the social-property system by which lords reproduced themselves economically. The lords' polity as a whole was highly decentralized, broken up into myriad rivalrous lordly groups, built around castles and constituted by mounted knights in armour, and constructed in the first instance to dominate so as to exploit peasants. This meant that lords were set in competition with one another for peasants, which was particularly marked in the early medieval period when land was plentiful; at those moments when lords sought to open up new land, especially by way of great movements of colonization to the east, south, and northwest; and in the later medieval period when population dropped sharply. But it also meant that the lords faced a major structural barrier to working together on a regular basis beyond narrow limits to sustain their control in the face of peasant resistance and flight. Peasants could thus play lords off, one against another, to extract concessions. Moreover, because lords were often in conflict precisely over who had jurisdiction over peasant communities, peasants could make use of their own solidarity, which often extended across several villages in a region, to mount successful local struggles to establish their rights.

The surprising outcome was that, even before the onset of the demographic crisis in the fourteenth century, throughout much of western Europe, great swathes of the lordly class faced serious difficulties in net-

[21] M. Bloch, *French Rural History* (orig. 1930; London, 1966).

ting sufficient revenue from their estates, and had as a result been severely weakened. Once population collapsed after 1348, virtually the entire lordly class found its very capacity to maintain itself seriously threatened, all the more so because the sudden increase in the land–man ratio exacerbated inter-lordly competition for peasants and because the lords' response to their revenue problem, by way of stepped-up warfare and taxation, tended to deepen the demographic downturn. If they were to survive qua feudal lords, seigneurs across Europe had no choice but to rebuild the institutions by which they exacted part of the product of their peasants and to stand up to and make war upon other lordly groups. What were required were political forms of class organization, i.e. feudal states, which could not only wield ever greater military power, but could also counter ever more successfully peasant mobility and peasant resistance.

The Maintenance through Restructuring of Feudal Social-property Relations

Over the long run, throughout *most* of Europe, east and west, feudal lords did succeed in securing their reproduction as feudal lords by constituting more cohesive political communities and building more effective states that could deal with and transcend the debilitating problem of inter-lordly competition that had hitherto been their Achilles' heel. This they accomplished by organizing themselves into political communities of much greater territorial scope than peasants were capable of, and evolving systems of surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion that, by virtue of their increased centralization, enhanced their ability to cooperate in taking peasants' surpluses. The resulting acceleration of state-building was partly a response to the exigencies of the late medieval crisis of seigneurial revenues and ensuing intensification of military conflict. But it can be understood more generally as a further stage in the long-term processes of political accumulation under pressure of inter-lordly competition and lord–peasant class struggle that marked the evolution of European feudalism from its inception.[22]

Western Europe: peasant proprietorship and the absolutist state. France and areas adjacent to it, including parts of western Germany, was the original home of banal lordship, and feudalism there assumed its 'classical', localized and competitive, character. From a relatively early

[22] See R. Brenner, 'The Rises and Falls of Serfdom in Medieval and Early Modern Europe', in M. L. Bush (ed.), *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage* (London, 1996).

date, therefore, the peasantry through much of the region was able to begin to undermine lordly powers. By the end of the thirteenth century, through occupation of uncultivated land, through flight to the manors of other lords, and especially through long processes of struggle for charters of rights on a village-by-village basis, it had succeeded in securing fixed money rents and the right to inherit.[23] The immediate result was that, with the exception of the greatest among them, lords were increasingly obliged to stand idly by as the steady increase of the prices of land and food grains that paralleled the growth of population eroded the real value of their dues and, in turn, their incomes, unless they could somehow secure more land and/or larger numbers of peasant tenants. When population ceased to grow as early as the second half of the thirteenth century, the lordly class as a whole could not avoid a major crisis of seigneurial revenues, which was only exacerbated following the demographic disasters of the fourteenth century.[24]

In France, and much of western Germany, the characteristic long-term solution to the later medieval crisis was therefore the construction of 'absolutist', or tax–office, states. Suffering from reduced revenues, local lords were often too weak to stand up to the expansionist designs of those great lordly competitors, monarchs and princes, who extended their territorial jurisdiction at their expense. At the same time, many of these same local lords were only too happy to offer their collaboration with those monarchs and princes, in exchange for places in their emerging feudal states. For their part, rather than expanding their politico-military followings in the usual decentralized manner by granting land and rights over peasants (e.g. fiefs) for loyalty and service, monarchs and princes granted offices in new centralized administrations, to be financed out of centralized tax revenues.[25]

[23] F. L. Ganshof and A. Verhulst, 'Medieval Agrarian Society in Its Prime: France, the Low Countries, and Western Germany', in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, I, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 334–9; G. Fourquin, 'Le temps de la croissance', in G. Duby and A. Wallon (eds), *Histoire de la France rurale*, 4 vols (Paris, 1975–6), I, pp. 388–90, 394, 483–4, 491; R. Fossier, 'Les conquêtes paysannes', in *La terre et les hommes en Picardie jusqu'à la fin du XIIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Paris, 1968), II, pp. 708–23.

[24] H. Neveux, 'Declin et reprise: La fluctuation bi-seculaire, 1330–1560', in Duby and Wallon (eds), *Histoire de la France rurale*, II, pp. 36, 39; G. Fourquin, *Les campagnes de la région parisienne à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1970), pp. 175–9; Fossier, *La terre et les hommes en Picardie*, II, pp. 555–6, 714; Bois, *Crise du féodalisme*, pp. 200, 202–3, 217–18.

[25] J.-F. Lemarignier, *La France médiévale* (Paris, 1970), pp. 227–30, 238–48, 296–8; E. M. Hallam, *Capetian France, 987–1328* (London, 1980), pp. 115–19; Bois, *Crise du féodalisme*, pp. 204, 254–6, 364; Fourquin, 'Le temps de la croissance', pp. 381–2, 483; Fourquin, *Campagnes de la région parisienne*, pp. 151–3, 166–8, 189–90.

The emerging tax–office state offered decisive advantages over its decentralized predecessors in exploiting the peasantry. Because taxes were taken on a centralized basis, peasants could not make use of mobility and inter-lordly competition to undermine lordly levies (even when the state was fairly small). Because a state with much greater territorial scope and politico-coercive capacity was collecting the revenues, peasants found themselves with insufficient power to resist paying taxes successfully, for their own organization was generally confined to the village or set of villages linked by a market town.

By the end of the long period of feudal economic expansion at the start of the fourteenth century, the tax–office state was still embryonic, a long way from consolidation. But, during the subsequent period of crisis, it experienced substantial development. As population downturn rendered local lords' revenue problems even worse, monarchs and princes were able to extend their administrations by carrying out expansionist military campaigns that naturally attracted impoverished seigneurs who assumed positions in the army, or in the taxing apparatus that was built up to finance the army, or in the system of royal justice. The ensuing wars, and the novel tax levies that accompanied them, proved disastrous for the peasantry, delaying the recovery of production. But, in the longer run, not only the tax–office state but also the peasants and their proprietorship emerged the stronger. In extending their authority *vis-à-vis* local lords, expanding absolutist states were, from very early on, only too glad to confirm the freedom and grant legal recognition to the already powerful rights that peasants had themselves won from their seigneurs, for seigneurial rents competed with centralized taxes. At various points during the later medieval period, peasants thus secured from the absolutist state full freedom, the end of their status as serfs in those provinces where it still persisted, and legal ownership of their plots, and this was critical in preventing lords from responding to their late medieval revenue crisis by attempting either to re-enserf their peasants or to expropriate them from their lands. On the other hand, these same peasant plots now emerged as a fertile field for the increasing taxation upon which the lordly officeholders of the tax–office state came to subsist.[26]

North-east Europe. Feudal social-property relations and the political communities that sustained them developed in north-east Europe—East

[26] Fourquin, *Campagnes de la région parisienne*, pp. 189–90, 430–2; Neveux, 'Declin et reprise', pp. 135–6; P. Chaun, 'L'état', in F. Braudel and E. Labrousse (eds), *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, 4 vols in 7 pts (Paris, 1970–80), I, pt 1, pp. 91–3; J. Jacquart, *La crise rurale en Ile-de-France, 1550–1670* (Paris, 1974), pp. 102–3.

Elbian Germany and Poland—significantly later than in western Europe, out of an epoch-making process of colonization. Small groups of lords took charge of the eastward movement and had little choice but to offer peasants extremely favourable terms in order to induce them to emigrate and settle. As a result, lordship in the region was from the beginning highly atomized and competitive, and correspondingly weak. To expand their income, lords depended upon opening up vast tracts of land, great estates upon which they settled ever more peasants. Emigration, population growth, and the reclamation of new land powered a long phase of economic expansion, as in the west. But, when population ceased to grow in western Europe, immigration toward the east largely dried up. Lords found that, in view of the highly decentralized and rivalrous character of the region's feudal structure, they could not continue to maintain themselves as lords in the old way, especially as they lacked the capacity to raise levies on an essentially free peasantry who paid minimal customary rents.

In north-east Europe, lords were able to transcend the ensuing threat to their domination, indeed their very survival as lords, only over the very long run, by securing a hitherto inconceivable level of self-organization through constructing a new form of state aimed explicitly at limiting inter-lordly competition and controlling peasant mobility. In so doing, north-east European lords were able to exploit key advantages that were, in a sense, the flip side of their previous weakness. Like the lords of the region, the peasants of north-east Europe, compared to their counterparts in western Europe, were only minimally organized at the village level, as they had constituted only weak institutions for self-government and the regulation of cultivation in the wake of the process of colonization. This was entirely understandable, in view of the minimal weight of lordship, the virtual non-existence of lordly controls, but it left the peasantry with minimal resources to resist novel lordly demands. At the same time, as a reflection of the late, colonial development of the whole region, the new ruling class of castellans had, in the process of establishing their own lordship in the region during the thirteenth century, brought about the dissolution of hitherto dominant princely states through processes analogous to those in the west two centuries earlier by which banal lords had established their jurisdictions at the expense of the Carolingians and their princely successors. This left them with only a rudimentary political organization, corresponding to that of west European feudalism in its classical epoch. But it also meant that they were relieved from having to confront any overarching 'national' states with systems of law that granted protection of property and persons to all free men, including those peasants who had managed to secure their freedom, such as

had emerged in several places in western Europe, notably France and England.

The outcome was that, in the process of organizing themselves for the first time into provincial and national political communities—which took the form of provincial and national diets or estates—the feudal lords of eastern Europe were able to build from the ground up, encountering no legally entrenched free peasantry. They were thus able to confine political participation in the institutions of the new political order—i.e. 'citizenship'—to themselves and, as the opposite side of the same coin, define the whole of the peasantry as unfree and as their own property. Meanwhile, they imposed a legal obligation on one another, as well as the towns, to return fleeing serfs. By tying peasants to their estates by means of vastly out-organizing them politically, north-east European lords were able to transform the nature of feudal exploitation in the region, expanding the size of their demesnes at the expense of peasants' subsistence plots and imposing historically unprecedented levels of labour services. As in much of western Europe, lords thus revived the system by which they coercively took a surplus from the peasantry by profoundly expanding the scope and cohesiveness of their political communities, extending the long-term feudal evolutionary process by which there emerged, over time in every region of Europe, ever larger and more powerful feudal states.[27]

The Transition to Capitalist Social-property Relations

In contrast to the evolution that took place throughout most of the Continent during the late medieval and early modern periods, in limited regions of north-west Europe, the outcome of the lords' and peasants' attempts to cope with the late medieval crisis of feudalism by feudal means issued in capitalist social-property relations as an unintended consequence.

England. In the course of extended conflicts with the Franks in north-west France, the conquest of England, and ensuing wars with the

[27] For this, and the previous paragraph, H. Lowmianski, 'Economic Problems of the Early Feudal Polish State', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, III (1960); A Giesztor, 'Recherches sur les fondements de la Pologne médiévale: état actuel des problèmes', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, IV (1961); J. Bardach 'Gouvernants et gouvernés en Pologne au moyen âge et aux temps modernes', *Recueils de la société Jean Bodin*, XXV (1965); K. Modzelewski, 'Le système du *ius ducale* en Pologne et le concept de féodalisme', *Annales E.S.C.*, XXXVII (1982); S. Russocki, 'Figure ou réel: Le féodalisme centralisé dans le centre-est de l'Europe', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, LXVI (1992); H. Rosenberg, 'The Rise of the Junkers in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1410–1653', *American Historical Review*, IL (October 1943).

emerging French monarchy—classic processes of political accumulation driven by inter-lordly competition—Anglo-Norman feudal lords brought into being a more centralized form of lordly political community or feudal state than existed anywhere else in Europe at that time. By organizing themselves 'nationally' through the monarchical state—which thereby assumed major powers to impose discipline on its aristocracy—they were able to achieve an unusually high level of cooperation with one another in operating their decentralized (implicitly competitive) system of surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion, as well as in making war. The characteristic, and decisive, manifestation of this evolution in the direction of greater cohesiveness was the imposition of a national system of common law to which the lordly class was itself subjected, which at once endowed access to the king's courts to all freemen, including peasants who had succeeded in establishing their own free status, and excluded from the king's courts all those peasants who were unfree, consigning them to the jurisdiction of their lords. As a consequence of the resulting increase in lordly powers, during the period from the late twelfth through to the early fourteenth century, at a time when French lords were, by and large, experiencing declining feudal levies as a consequence of peasant conquests, English lords enjoyed an economic golden age (that may have extended right up to the eve of the Black Plague) by virtue of their ability, with the help of their monarchical state, to impose a tighter form of serfdom, of feudal domination, upon their tenants, not to mention to effectively wage war on a trans-European scale.[28]

Nevertheless, in the wake of the catastrophic collapse of population, even the politically unified English lordly class was unable to make its system of decentralized surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion function effectively. Following the Black Plague, lords sought to compensate for the radical decline in the number of their tenants by raising rents and making use of Parliament—another expression of the unusually high level and broad scope of their political organization—to tighten controls over peasant mobility, and for a time they do appear to have succeeded. But, in the face of the enormous decline of the man–land ratio, lordly efforts at cooperation ultimately gave way to the pressures of competition for tenants, opening the way for peasants to win their freedom by means of resistance and setting lords against one another. The revolt of 1381, despite the defeat of the peasant rising, seems to have opened the flood-

[28] For a fuller account of these developments, specifically the self-centralization of the English feudal aristocracy around the monarchy and its consequences, see R. Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', in *The Brenner Debate*, pp. 254–8, 264.

gates. Peasants now streamed away from their manors, and their lords could do nothing to stop them. This was because other lords on neighbouring estates could not only offer more favourable terms in general, especially lower dues, but could also grant them their freedom by offering them the status of free tenants. This they accomplished in formal–legal terms by offering each peasant a copy of the section of the manorial roll where the terms of his tenancy were stated—in effect a contract, in theory between legal equals, that the peasant could go to court to enforce. The upshot was to render irreversible the process of peasant enfranchisement, cutting off the possibility of re-enserfment, because the common law enforced by the crown, with the support of lords great and small, endowed all freemen with the protection of the king's courts. By the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the vast majority of English peasants had won their freedom, and, as a consequence of their much improved bargaining position,were paying, at least for the time being, much lower rents.[29]

In the face of peasants' success in winning their freedom and legal backing for their customary rights as recognized in the manorial rolls, much of the English feudal class, their capacity to take an income from manorial land held in customary tenure now in question, faced a fundamental threat to their existence as lords. Their way blocked by peasants' freedom, English lords could not respond to the danger that confronted them by seeking to reimpose upon their tenants the hitherto existing form of decentralized feudal levies. At the same time, because they held outright broad demesnes and were unwilling to regard the customary holdings of their peasants as anything but, in the last analysis, their own property (something peasants of course would have disputed), English lords had no interest in the construction of a tax–office state, for such a state would have had to depend on taxes on their own land—and not, as in France or western Germany, on that of the peasants. English lords therefore had little choice, in contrast to their counterparts in north-eastern Europe with their neo-serfdom and in western Europe with their absolutist states, but to make use of their not insubstantial feudal political class organization to turn what remained of their rights in their peasants' customary land into their own unconditional ownership. Their continued holding, throughout the medieval period, of large swathes of land outright—i.e. demesnes of a much larger size than

[29] R. H. Hilton, *The Decline of Serfdom in Medieval England* (London, 1969), pp. 35–59; J. A. Raftis, *Tenure and Mobility* (Toronto, 1964), pp. 139–45; Z. Razi, 'Family, Land, and the Village Community in Later Medieval England', *Past and Present*, XCIII (November 1981).

could be found throughout most of western Europe—was certainly important in this respect. But what turned out to be their trump card was their ability to turn to, and rapidly build up further, the powerful national monarchical state that they had constructed during the medieval epoch.

With the decisive help of the early Tudor state and its courts, English lords were able to valorize in court their claim, against the contentions of their tenants, that much formerly customary, now copyhold, land held by their peasants was ultimately subject to arbitrary, thus variable, fines or rents on transfer (at inheritance or otherwise). It could therefore, sooner or later, be transformed into what was, in effect, a commercial leasehold—and was, therefore, in the end, the lords' property. With the state's indispensable assistance, they were able, in turn, to quell the series of major peasants' revolts during the first half of the sixteenth century that were motivated precisely by the goal of vindicating and confirming peasants' customary rights. As a consequence, English lords succeeded in cutting short peasants' push to win not just their freedom, but fixed payments and rights of inheritance to their land. They thereby at once established their property rights in the land and, by separating their tenants from their full means of subsistence, rendered them dependent upon the market.[30]

It must be emphasized that, in asserting their right to vary the level of dues as they wished, English lords were, in their view, acting in time-honoured fashion and merely reaffirming their feudal right to impose arbitrary levies on their customary tenants. Their aim was not to establish a new system, but merely to prevent peasants from consolidating a set of possessory rights—namely fixed dues and rights to inherit—that would not only have extinguished the lords' ability to take anything like an economic return from the customary land, but, in view of the tendency to inflation under population growth, threatened their capacity to take any real rent at all. Nevertheless, the epoch-making, if unintended, consequence was to subject their tenants to competition for leases, thereby imposing upon them the necessity to forsake production for subsistence and adopt capitalist rules for reproduction. Now rendered market-dependent and subjected to competition in production, emerging farmers had no choice but to eschew 'safety first', as well as the other rules for reproduction that had been made possible by peasant possession of the means of subsistence, and to adopt the Smithian rule of maximization

[30] For this, and the preceding paragraph, see Brenner, 'Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', pp. 291–9.

of one's price–cost ratio by way of specialization, accumulation, and innovation.

The northern Netherlands. As did that of north-east Europe, the Dutch feudal economy emerged out of an extended process of colonization. But here peasants took the lead, establishing what was to a great extent a new agricultural economy by bringing land formerly submerged by water under cultivation. The outcome was that lordship was never strong, and before long had, over much of the territory, essentially given way to both peasant liberty and full peasant property in relatively large plots of land. The latter were consolidated by the establishment by pioneering peasants of powerful village institutions to regulate systems of ditches and dykes that had been created to secure the land from the sea.[31]

The fact remains, however, that, though largely unburdened by feudal lordship and in full possession of their plots, Dutch agricultural producers were unable to establish themselves as peasant possessors of the means of subsistence on a permanent basis. Dutch development was shaped by the fact that it occurred, for the most part, at the limit of the feudal economy, through processes whereby settlers sought to extend their traditional agriculture on what was ultimately marginal land, peat bogs that were drained and dyked. Initially, following their success in reclaiming land from the sea, settler agriculturalists did, at least to a notable degree, succeed in their goal of setting themselves up as arable farmers able to carry out the diversified productive activities, above all the production of food, that were required to shield them from market dependence and the pressures of competition. But, over the long run, changing ecological conditions would not permit them to continue, in this mode, to produce for subsistence, marketing only physical surpluses.

During the later medieval period, the peat lands settled or sank and the surrounding water level rose, with the consequence that land that had been initially suitable for arable production ceased to be so. Peasants were separated from possession of their means of subsistence by ecological shifts taking place at the margin of the feudal economy. More or less suddenly, they found their land unable to produce food grains. As a consequence, though remaining owners of their plots, the peasants ceased to be

[31] J. de Vries, *Dutch Agriculture in the Golden Age* (New Haven, CT, 1974), pp. 24–32; J. de Vries and A. van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 16–20; P. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Agricultural Production and Technology in the Netherlands, c. 1000–1500', in G. Astill and J. Langdon (eds), *Medieval Farming and Technology: The Impact of Agricultural Change in Northwest Europe* (Leiden, 1997).

able to secure from them directly all that they needed to survive. Separated from the means of subsistence, they were therefore rendered dependent upon the market for key inputs, and ultimately obliged to sell goods and services to pay for them. This meant subjection to competition, with the consequence that peasants were willy-nilly transformed into farmers, compelled to turn to pursuits that they could provide at relatively low cost. The latter turned out to include fishing and shipping and, ultimately, specialized dairying and cattle raising. So, by attempting, as feudal actors in a feudal manner, to continue to sustain feudal social-property relations and feudal rules for reproduction—specifically peasant possession and production for subsistence—on terrain that, over time, ceased to allow this, Dutch peasant agriculturalists brought about the opposite effect they intended. They undermined the necessary conditions for their own established form of life and ended up installing the social-property relations that would underpin a new capitalist economy.[32]

Divergent Social-property Relations, Diverging Economic Paths

It is my fundamental argument that, just as the establishment and reproduction of feudal social-property relations determined both the rise of a commercial economy instantiated in the town–division of labour *and* a constricted Malthusian–Ricardian pattern of secular stagnation driven by population growth and declining labour productivity, the rise of capitalist social-property relations provided the sine qua non for Smithian self-sustaining growth—the obsessive pursuit of the gains from trade via price–cost maximization under the pressure of competition making for specialization, accumulation of surpluses, and innovation, and leading to the ongoing growth of output per unit of labour input. It remains therefore to show that the divergent systems of social-property relations that consolidated themselves in different parts of Europe in the late medieval and early modern era—revamped versions of the old structure in north-east Europe, Germany, and France, parallelled by agrarian capitalism in England and the northern Netherlands—gave rise to correspondingly divergent patterns of non-development and development.

[32] For this, and the previous paragraph, Hoppenbrouwers, 'Agricultural Production and Technology in the Netherlands'; de Vries and van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy*, pp. 17–18; J. L. van Zanden, *The Rise and Decline of Holland's Economy: Merchant Capitalism and the Labour Market* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 30–1.

Restructured Feudalism: The Continuation of the Malthusian–Ricardian Pattern

France: peasant proprietors and the tax–office state. With the emergence in France of a restructured system of social-property relations characterized, as before, by lordly surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion—now in the form of the absolutist tax–office state—in combination with peasant possession—now in the guise of full peasant ownership—economic actors adopted rules for reproduction rather analogous to those that prevailed under classical feudalism. As a result, during the early modern period there was a second run-through of the long-term demo-economic cycle that marked the medieval epoch.

While much of the French peasantry emerged from the population catastrophes of the later medieval period with unusually large farms, peasants did not generally break from their commitment to their long-established rules for reproduction—production for subsistence in connection with having large families and subdividing holdings to make possible the settling of children on their own plots and in turn a demographic regime of early marriage and low celibacy. Lords, for their part, were able to depend for their economic reproduction to a much greater extent than before on offices financed by absolutist taxation, which increased rapidly from about 1550. Otherwise, they had to be content to profit from the rents they could derive from (rather narrow) demesnes, since peasants had, in most parts of the country, succeeded in fixing rents on customary land at derisory levels.

From 1450 until the latter part of the sixteenth century, the French economy enjoyed a 'growth phase' similar to the long expansion from the eleventh through the later thirteenth century. Aided by peasants' accession to unusually large holdings on the morrow of the population catastrophes and lords' initially restrained tax levies, population growth took place exceptionally quickly, reaching the thirteenth-century 'Malthusian ceiling' by 1560–70. The area of settlement grew correspondingly rapidly, expanding outward on the basis of a new wave of assarting and colonization. As rent income rose with the reoccupation of land and taxes increased (at first slowly), the corresponding increase in lordly demand for military and luxury goods provided the foundations for a new rise of industry, towns, and trade.

Nevertheless, while there were no technical advances to speak of, rising population soon brought about the pulverization of holdings and reliance on less fertile land, leading once again to a decline in labour productivity, manifested in rising land and food prices and declining terms of trade for industrial versus agricultural products. On the basis of

their initially large holdings, much of the French peasantry had, at first, commanded sufficient surpluses to enter urban food markets in a big way. But as plots and thus surpluses diminished under the impact of subdivision, a process of decommercialization soon ensued, and by 1550 shipments to the towns were in decline, despite rising prices for provisions. Meanwhile, as early as the 1520s, there was the onset of a new and extended series of 'crises of subsistence', indicating that the agricultural economy was already being stretched.[33]

Ultimately, as in the thirteenth century, peasants began more and more to find themselves deprived of plots sufficient for subsistence, a process aggravated by rising taxation. Lacking other alternatives, they had little choice but to intensify labour on their own plots, seek employment as agricultural wage labourers, and take up leases to make ends meet. Especially by deploying their family labour force more fully, they once again raised the productivity of their land at the expense of the productivity of their labour, especially in those places where it was possible to take up the production of labour-intensive commercial crops or to enter domestic manufacturing. At the same time, in having little choice but to intensify labour and/or accept ever lower wages and/or pay ever higher rents to cover the difference between what their plots provided and what they needed to survive, they were obliged to increase 'self-exploitation' and/or to make it possible for landlords to take from them ever increasing 'hunger rents' and/or for merchants to enjoy increasing profits by employing more labour rather than equipping their workers with new plant and equipment.

From the latter part of the sixteenth century, the French social economy, like that of most of the rest of Europe, began to descend into a 'general crisis of the seventeenth century' quite analogous to its fourteenth-century predecessor, as an incipient Malthusian demographic crisis was compounded once again by a crisis of seigneurial revenues. As output per person declined and population growth came to a halt, seigneurial revenues tended to stagnate. Civil wars became endemic, foreign military adventures multiplied, the state apparatus expanded, and absolutist taxation rose precipitately, as lords sought to compensate for stationary incomes from their estates by way of politico-military redistri-

[33] For this, and the previous paragraph, see Le Roy Ladurie, 'Masses profondes: la paysannerie', in Braudel and Labrousse (eds), *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, I, pt 2, pp. 555–61; Neveux, 'Declin et reprise', pp. 101–3; H. Neveux, *Les grains du Cambrésis* (Lille, 1974), pp. 692, 697–8; Bois, *Crise du féodalisme*, pp. 337–40; Jacquart, 'Immobilisme et catastrophes, 1550–1660', in Duby and Wallon (eds), *Histoire de la France rurale*, II, pp. 213, 216–21, 224–5, 237–9.

bution. Nevertheless, as rising taxation and military depredations undercut peasant production, the peasant population fell and peasant revolts grew in number, exacerbating lordly revenue problems and setting off the same sort of downward spiral, driven by demographic decline and rising exploitation and war, that had disrupted the economy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[34]

North-east Europe: from neo-serfdom to economic regression. The emergence in north-east Europe at the end of the middle ages of a very much tighter form of feudal social-property relations than had hitherto prevailed—neo-serfdom made possible by the rise of provincial and national diets or estates—opened the way for a predictable overall evolution. As in France (and much of the rest of western Europe), lords and peasants adopted, albeit in somewhat altered form, essentially the same rules for reproduction that they had maintained during the medieval period. At first, through much of the sixteenth century, as population and the area of settlement grew, production increased and the income of both lords and peasants grew, while commerce expanded. But in the longer run agricultural growth on the basis of expanding demesnes and increasing services offered only the most restricted possibilities for development despite the fact that it was increasingly oriented to international markets.

By the 1560s and 1570s, with labour productivity declining and population growth coming to a standstill, Poland's national output appears to have reached its outer limit, and the results were apparently much the same throughout the rest of north-east Europe. From this point onward, the growth of the lords' product depended upon coercively enforced redistributive measures and was largely achieved by increasing the size of the demesnes at the expense of the peasants' plots. But this process could go only so far, as it eroded the system's chief productive force, the peasantry. To maintain military and luxury consumption, lords were obliged to resort to the familiar 'political' remedies and became increasingly involved in devastating warfare, both internal and external. The result was severe economic regression and social dislocation, the north-east European version of the 'general crisis of the seventeenth century'.[35]

[34] For this, and the previous paragraph, see Le Roy Ladurie, 'Masses profondes: la paysannerie', pp. 576–85; Jacquart, 'Immobilisme et catastrophes', pp. 186–211, 242–75.

[35] A. Maczak, 'Export of Grain and the Problem of Distribution of National Income in the Years 1550–1650', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, XVIII (1968); J. Topolski, 'La regression économique en Pologne du XVIe au XVIIIe siècles', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, XII (1962).

Capitalism in Agriculture and the Breakthrough to Self-sustaining Growth

England: commercial landlordism and capitalist tenantry. The late fifteenth century saw the emergence of commercial landlordism and a market-dependent commercial tenantry as a consequence of the separation from their means of subsistence of peasants who had won their freedom from serfdom. Lords retained large demesnes, which were leased for commercial rent. Customary tenants, who had gained their freedom via resistance and flight in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, gained 'security of tenure', but only in the limited sense that they could now go to the king's courts to enforce the conditions of their customary holdings (copyhold). But these conditions were not necessarily favourable to the tenants. Customary tenants were thus, over time, reduced to *leaseholders*, for landlords successfully (throughout most of England) asserted their right to levy variable fines on inheritance or on other transfers of holdings, and these came to substitute for commercial rents.[36]

Reduced to market dependence, commercial tenants had no choice but to adopt 'production for exchange' as their rule for reproduction, initiating a revolution in the mode of life of English agriculturalists. The pressure of competition thus compelled them to maximize profits by specializing, accumulating surpluses, innovating, and moving from line to line in response to fluctuations in demand. It induced them at the same time to eschew the panoply of peasant rules for reproduction that had depended upon their possessing the means of subsistence and producing for subsistence, especially having many children so as to secure insurance for ill health and old age and subdividing holdings. With the end of subdivision on inheritance, the material basis for the early marriage pattern that had prevailed throughout much of Europe in much of the medieval period, and continued to do so during the early modern period, was thus eliminated. Because they could no longer immediately secure from their parents the material basis for founding a family, sons generally had to wait until they were older to marry. Later marriage age, as well as higher rates of celibacy, thus became the norm.

The adoption of new rules for reproduction by agricultural producers brought a novel, unprecedentedly dynamic pattern of overall development. With the generalization of competitive pressures and with the end of subdivision, there quickly ensued a classical process of social differentiation, leading to the rise of a class of substantial commercial farmers, the

[36] Brenner, 'Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', pp. 294–6. Cf. B. M. S. Campbell, 'People and Land in the Middle Ages, 1066–1500', in R. A. Dodgshon and R. A. Butlin (eds), *An Historical Geography of England and Wales*, 2nd edn (London, 1990), pp. 112–13.

yeomen. It was on the basis of the rise of the yeomen as commercial-competitive farmers, that there was, for the first time, a breakthrough to *the secular rise of agricultural productivity*. How did this occur?

1 Compared with medieval peasants, with their subsistence plots of 20 acres or less, by 1600 English farmers disposed of large holdings, averaging about 60 acres. Indeed, farms of 100 acres or more covered 70 per cent of the cultivated surface. This enabled English agriculturalists for the first time efficiently to deploy their family labour force in grain production.[37] Above all, they succeeded in eliminating the massive disguised unemployment that had hitherto held down labour productivity. At the same time, by having recourse to wage labour, they were able to adjust labour inputs to the needs of the changing requirements of production, seasonal or otherwise.
2 Under pressure to compete, farmers sharply stepped up capital investment, above all in animals, and this allowed for major gains in the pulling of carts, ploughing, and the fertilization of the soil.[38]
3 As market-dependent producers, farmers could no longer seek to avoid specialization, so now had no hesitation in integrating fodder crops into complex new rotations, premised upon full-scale specialization and commercialization. At the core of what came to be known as the 'agricultural revolution', the cultivation of these plants allowed simultaneously for the more intensive use of the soil and the increase in soil fertility.[39]
4 Finally, there was an impressive development of the regional division of labour, as farmers adapted and readapted their crops to soil and climate in accord with changing techniques. Initially, agriculturalists were obliged to grow grain on the heavy, clayey, and wet, but relatively more fertile, soils of the Midlands, despite the relatively greater difficulty of ploughing this land. However, on finding that the new fodder crops took better on hitherto less fertile light sandy soils than the heavy ones, they reverted to animal raising in what had been the old granary of the Midlands,

[37] Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, pp. 73–4.
[38] E. A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance, and Change: The Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 37–44.
[39] E. Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution* (London, 1967); E. Kerridge, *The Farmers of Old England* (London, 1973); J. Thirsk, 'Seventeenth-century Agriculture and Social Change', in eadem (ed.), *Land, Church and People: Essays Presented to Professor H. P. R. Finberg*, Supplement to *Agricultural History Review*, XVIII (1970).

and devoted the south of the country even more fully than before to the cultivation of grain.[40]

With labour productivity in agriculture finally on the increase, the English economy broke definitively from the Malthusian–Ricardian pattern of secular stagnation during the course of the seventeenth century. Despite the steady growth of population, there were no significant subsistence crises after 1597. Indeed, by 1700, English farmers were succeeding in supporting more than half the population off the land,[41] even though the English population continued to grow, breaking through old Malthusian ceilings. Meanwhile, the increasing proportion of the population off the land in non-agricultural pursuits, as well as the emergence of an agricultural population largely dependent upon the market, made for the early rise of a domestic market—for consumer goods, small tools, and the like. When, in the later seventeenth century, the ongoing growth of agricultural productivity finally issued in falling relative prices for food, the resulting rise in real wages and in turn of discretionary expenditures provided the basis for a dynamically growing market for industrial goods. Well before the classical industrial revolution, then, on the basis of agricultural revolution, England had gone a good way toward modern industrialization.

The northern Netherlands: commercial farming and capitalist development. By 1500, Dutch agriculture lacked a peasantry, in the sense of peasant possessors able to adopt the rule for reproduction of 'production for subsistence'. Whether owner-operators on the inland peat lands or commercial leaseholders on the large arable farms that dominated the land along the coast, Dutch agriculturalists found themselves unable to provide their full subsistence, and were thus market dependent and subject to competition in production, with little choice but to specialize and produce for exchange. The result was an economic evolution, rather analogous to that of England, despite the many major differences between Dutch and English agriculture in structure and operation.

Dutch agriculture developed in response to the requirements of dairy and livestock production, which offered the greatest opportunity for

[40] E. L. Jones, 'Introduction', in *Agricultural and Economic Growth in England, 1660–1815* (New York, 1967), pp. 9–11, 36–7; E. L. Jones, 'Agriculture and Economic Growth in England, 1660–1750: Agricultural Change', *Journal of Economic History*, XXV (1965), pp. 10–18.

[41] E. A. Wrigley, 'Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXV (1985); G. Clarke, 'Labour Productivity in English Agriculture, 1300–1860', in Campbell and Overton (eds), *Land, Labour and Livestock*.

profit in much of maritime Netherlands, given the region's ecology and proximity to markets. Initially, Dutch farmers undertook a run of commercial non-agricultural pursuits, like fishing, shipping, and cloth production, to help them eke out a living from the difficult soil. But over time, especially as cheap grain imports from eastern Europe became available and market demand grew all across Europe, competitive pressures induced them to shed their non-agricultural sidelines and specialize ever more intensely in the production of butter, cheese, and cattle. In so doing, they undertook large-scale investments, not only in land reclamation (where they were aided by urban investors), but in farm infrastructure and farm implements. Farms did not have to become very large, since economies of scale in dairy and livestock raising were limited; still, plots were not subdivided, and reached a size well above the average in neighbouring lands, such as inland Flanders, that were dominated by possessing peasants farming for subsistence and parcellizing their holdings. The outcome over the course of the century and a half or so after 1500 was an impressive increase in labour productivity.[42]

As in England, the rise of capitalist social-property relations—leading to the growth of specialization, investment, 'larger' farms, and—as a consequence—rising labour productivity in agriculture—provided the basis for the transformation of the overall pattern of economic development. Rather than developing in conjunction with the production of commercial crops (and the cultivation of grain for food) as an extension of peasants' drive to 'produce for subsistence', industrial production in the Netherlands was early on ejected from farm households as a consequence of their specialization in agriculture. It therefore located itself in specialized firms in dynamic country towns which grew up to meet the demands of farmers for implements, services, and consumer goods. By the seventeenth century, a substantial majority of the labour force had left agriculture, and, while the population grew as rapidly as anywhere in Europe in this epoch, it hit no Malthusian ceiling. With the English, then, the Dutch economy, like no others in Europe, substantially escaped the 'seventeenth-century crisis' by achieving ongoing economic development.[43]

[42] De Vries and van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy*, pp. 98–210.
[43] De Vries, *Dutch Agriculture in the Golden Age*, pp. 110–15; de Vries and van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy*, pp. 18–19, 200–4, 208–9, 272, 351, 665–6, 688.

Conclusion: Patterns of Economic Evolution in Comparative Perspective

The rise of capitalist social-property relations on the land in England and the northern Netherlands unleashed an economy-wide transformation amounting to nothing less than modern self-sustaining economic development. Above all, the subjection of agricultural producers in possession of their means of production but not their means of subsistence to the pressures of competition impelled them to adopt capitalist rules for reproduction that made for the central break beyond pre-capitalist economy—the ongoing rise of labour productivity in agriculture, rather than its opposite. The resulting breakthrough can be seen in the whole pattern of English and Dutch economic evolution leading into the industrial revolution and the way that it diverged from most of the Continent during this epoch.

The economies of England and the Netherlands were the only ones in Europe to experience increasing agricultural productivity across the early modern period; everywhere else in Europe there was stagnation or decline. (See Table 4.3.) In this respect England further extended its lead in the century 1750–1850. (See Table 4.4.) By virtue of the growth of their agricultural productivity, England and the Netherlands were not only freed from the limitation of Malthusian ceilings, but also, at the same time, were able to support a rapidly increasing proportion of the population out of agriculture, leaving everyone else, in this respect, ever further behind. (See Table 4.5.) In both places, moreover, the population was pulled in the direction of industry and the towns by the unparallelled growth of discretionary spending (non-necessities), dependent in turn on growth of real wages that was, once again, without equal elsewhere in Europe. England and the Netherlands were indeed the only locales which broke beyond the traditional Malthusian pattern whereby real wages fell as population rose, and saw real wages rise rather than decline between 1500 and 1750/1800. (See Table 4.6.)

The opposite side of the same coin was a path of industrial development unmatched elsewhere, most especially in England. In both England and the Netherlands, industry ceased to develop as a peasant sideline, as a method of rounding out the peasant consumption basket, pursued without reference to the rate of return it yielded. In fact, separated from arable production, manufacturing developed, particularly in England in specialized industrial districts, which quickly evolved into fast-growing towns, that offered a long series of advantages unavailable to domestic production by peasants—including the development of skills, the rise of specialist

toolmakers, plus the range of external economies long ago noted by Alfred Marshall. The rate of urbanization between 1500 and 1800, especially in England but also in the Netherlands, had, again, no close parallels elsewhere in Europe. (See Tables 4.7 and 4.8.) It is not perhaps too much to say that just as the supersession of the peasantry was the key to the growth of agricultural productivity and agricultural revolution, the separation of manufacturing from the peasantry was the indispensable foundation for dynamic industrial development, and ultimately the industrial revolution.

Table 4.3. The growth of agricultural productivity in Europe, 1500–1800.*

	England	Netherlands	Belgium	France	Germany	Spain	Austria
1500	1	1.07	1.39	0.83	0.74	0.89	0.91
1600	0.76	1.06	1.26	0.72	0.57	0.76	0.57
1700	1.15	1.24	1.2	0.74	0.54	0.87	0.74
1750	1.54	1.48	1.22	0.8	0.56	0.8	0.91
1800	1.43	1.44	1.11	0.83	0.67	0.7	0.81

*Output per worker, England in 1500 = 1.00.
Source: R. C. Allen, 'Economic Structure and Agricultural Productivity in Europe, 1300–1800', *European Review of Economic History*, III (2000), p. 20.

Table 4.4. European agricultural labour productivity levels, 1750 and 1850.*

	1750	1850
England	100	100
Netherlands	96	54
Belgium	79	37
France	52	44
Germany	36	42
Austria	57	32

*Output per worker, England = 100.
Sources:
1750 R. C. Allen, 'Economic Structure and Agricultural Productivity in Europe, 1300–1800', *European Review of Economic History*, III (2000), p. 20.
1850 G. Clarke, 'Agriculture in the Industrial Revolution, 1700–1860', in J. Mokyr (ed.), *The British Industrial Revolution* (Boulder, CO, 1999), p. 211.

Table 4.5. Distribution of the population by sector, 1500 and 1750.

	Urban		Rural non-agricultural		Total non-agricultural		Agricultural	
	1500	1750	1500	1750	1500	1750	1500	1750
England	0.07	0.23	0.18	0.32	0.25	0.55	0.74	0.45
Netherlands	0.3	0.36	0.14	0.22	0.17	0.58	0.56	0.44
Belgium	0.28	0.22	0.14	0.26	0.42	0.48	0.58	0.51
France	0.09	0.13	0.18	0.26	0.27	0.39	0.73	0.61
Germany	0.08	0.09	0.18	0.27	0.26	0.36	0.73	0.64
Austria/Hungary	0.05	0.07	0.19	0.32	0.24	0.39	0.76	0.61
Spain	0.19	0.21	0.16	0.16	0.36	0.37	0.65	0.63
Italy	0.22	0.23	0.16	0.19	0.38	0.42	0.62	0.58

Source: R. C. Allen, 'Economic Structure and Agricultural Productivity in Europe, 1300–1800', *European Review of Economic History*, III (2000), p. 11

Table 4.6. European real wages: building craftsman.*

	1550–99	1600–49	1650–99	1700–49	1750–99
London	9.6	9.4	10.7	11.4	11.4
Amsterdam	5.1	6.7	7.2	7.8	7
Antwerp	6.4	6.7	6	6.2	6
Paris	4.6	4.3	4.4	3.9	3.6
Augsburg	3.7	2.9	4.6	4	3.6
Vienna	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.2	3.4

*Nominal wages in ounces of silver deflated by consumer price index.
Source: R. C. Allen, 'Wages and Prices in Europe from the Middle Ages to the First World War' (August 1998), Department of Economics, University of British Colombia website.

Table 4.7. European urbanization: relative increase in population by sector, 1500–1750.

	Total	Urban	Rural non-agricultural	Agricultural
England	2.4	7.7	4.24	1.46
Netherlands	2	2.46	3.07	1.48
Belgium	1.84	1.46	3.81	1.64
Germany	1.52	1.63	2.27	1.33
France	1.44	2.09	2.07	1.21
Italy	1.55	1.58	1.85	1.47
Spain	1.28	1.49	1.3	1.22

Source: R. C. Allen, 'Economic Structure and Agricultural Productivity in Europe, 1300–1800', *European Review of Economic History*, III (2000) p. 10.

Table 4.8. Urbanization in England and on the Continent: percentage of total population in towns with 10,000 or more people.

	1600	1700	1750	1800
England	6.1	13.4	17.5	24
North and west Europe minus England	9.2	12.8	12.1	10
Europe minus England	8.1	9.2	9.4	9.5

Source: E. A. Wrigley, 'Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period', *Journal of Interdisiciplinary History*, XV (Spring 1985), p. 708.

5.
Marxism and Its Others

CATHERINE HALL

In the 1960s, when I was learning to be an historian, critical historical work was intimately associated with Marxism. In the first decade of the twenty-first century the majority of students studying history have little sense that reading Marx might be an important aspect of their training. But does Marx still matter for historians? And, if so, how?

In the 1960s I learned to think with Marxist historians. Christopher Hill's *Century of Revolution* was the A-level text at my school; Edward Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* was published in my first year at university; Rodney Hilton taught me medieval history. Discovering feminism in the late 1960s I critiqued British Marxist historiography along with the rest of my generation of feminist historians and set about writing a history that built on that legacy but put questions of gender at its centre. In the late 1980s, impelled by debates over difference, I began to consider the centrality of 'race' and ethnicity to British history and since then have worked to put domestic histories and imperial histories, long seen as separate subjects, back together.[1] At the beginning of this journey it seemed that a 'proper' understanding of Marx might provide all the answers. But the *Capital* reading groups of the 1970s could not elucidate the centrality of gender to the social order or the making of gendered subjectivities with their social and psychic dimensions. The attempt to analyse the sexual division of labour and patterns of reproduction through Marxist categories sent us down many blind alleys. Similarly, Marxist readings of 'race' and class helped with only certain aspects of the question that became very pressing in the 1980s—how had British culture come to be racialized? Marx's objects of study and subjects of history were limited. Marx needed Others—whether through feminist, post-structuralist, or post-colonial routes.

[1] For a longer account of this, see C. Hall, 'Feminism and Feminist History', in *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1–40.

This chapter is written not from the perspective of a scholar of Marx, but from that of an historian trying to understand the complexities of nineteenth-century societies and to utilize those conceptual categories that seem best to engage with the many layers of the social, political, and cultural world. In the absence of Marxism and with the giving up of grand narratives there has been a tendency to lose interest in large-scale changes and a retreat to the thick description of micro-histories. A return to Marx, therefore, is timely from the perspective of an historian trying to understand how change occurs and pondering over the relation between key categories of difference. While the logic of class antagonisms as the driving force of history cannot work on its own, we cannot do without an analysis of class and of economic relations. We cannot abandon questions about agency and change, even though Marx's own formulations leave us with uncertainties as to the relation between the logic of capital and the antagonisms of class. Returning to 'the big picture' means a return to Marx's questions but not necessarily his answers, and supplementing his questions with those he did not ask. It may require us to revisit forgotten texts and think again about connection.

* * *

Let me open with a description of a particular historical conjuncture—that of the United Kingdom and its empire between 1828 and 1833. This was a moment when questions of political citizenship and forms of rule both 'at home' and across the empire were reassessed; when the forms of conservative aristocratic rule both in Britain and the colonies were ruptured and a new vision of nation and empire articulated. The four sites of my conjuncture are Ireland, Britain, Jamaica, and India: the seat of government for all of them, Westminster. In what follows each case study is dealt with only very schematically and only one dimension and one axis of difference is considered: that of ethnicity, class, or 'race', while gender runs through them all.[2] Each could be told in a different way—highlighting other stories. My intention is to explore to what extent Marxism has a continued salience in the analysis of this conjuncture: what theoretical work does it do, what does it fail to address?

[2] For another version of this argument which focuses on the conjuncture of 1829–33 and does not address the question of the relevance of Marxism, see C. Hall, 'The Rule of Difference: Gender, Class and Empire in the Making of the1832 Reform Act', in I. Blom, K. Hagemann, and C. Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations: Nationalism and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 107–36.

Ireland. Ireland had been formally united with England since the Act of Union of 1801, with Irish MPs sitting in the House of Commons and peers in the House of Lords. But Catholics were still discriminated against. In 1828 the long campaign for Catholic emancipation was coming to a climax. Irish Catholics were demanding equal civil and political rights with Protestants—an end to the prohibition on Catholics holding positions in government or the judiciary, a right to sit in parliament at Westminster. They claimed equality as men—'We are men and deserve to be free.'[3] They sought political freedom and celebrated anti-colonial struggles in Latin America. They mobilized in hundreds of thousands in the Catholic Association behind their charismatic leader Daniel O'Connell, who articulated their grievances as those of an oppressed nation, seeking redress from a colonizing power. Popular opinion in Britain was hostile to emancipation. Yet the conservative government led by the Duke of Wellington and Robert Peel—themselves both long-term antagonists to any change in what was known as 'the Protestant Constitution'—decided that they had to concede to the Irish claim in 1829. Otherwise, Wellington argued, civil war would ensue. The quid pro quo for the 'gift' of emancipation was that 84,000 Irish voters lost the franchise when 40 shilling freeholders were disqualified. Irish voters, it was believed in England, unlike their English counterparts, were not yet fit for representative government. They could not be trusted to make independent judgements for they followed the will of either their landlord or their priest. O'Connell, 'the Liberator', took his seat in the House of Commons in 1830 but it was soon realized that emancipation had made little difference to any but a small number of middle-class professionals. Repeal of the Union between Britain and Ireland became the new political demand. By 1833 (after the passing of the Reform Acts, which needed Irish parliamentary support) widespread unrest in Ireland led to a new Coercion Act passed by the Whig government and significant new powers for the police and army.

Britain. Parliamentary reformers in England who had long sought to challenge 'Old Corruption' were quick to take up the 'lessons in manliness' of the Catholic Association and to mobilize outside Westminster. Many radicals sought universal male suffrage, the abolition of pocket boroughs, the representation of the industrial towns, and a secret ballot. This was the radical culture depicted by E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*. Moderate middle-class reforming men—those

[3] *Report of the Committee appointed by the Catholic Association, 1824*, in E. Curtis and R. B. McDowell (eds), *Irish Historical Documents* (London, 1943), p. 243.

around the Whiggish *Edinburgh Review*, the utilitarian brotherhood, merchants and manufacturers from Birmingham to Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds—sought their own enfranchisement. By the end of the 1820s even the aristocratic Whig elite, long denied power, had come to see that some reform of the constitution was necessary. The revolutions in France and Belgium in 1830, widespread agricultural unrest across the south and south-east of England, the numerous political unions, and the refusal of Wellington to brook any change produced a political crisis. After months of campaigns—dramatic scenes in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, significant riots in Nottingham, Derby, and Bristol, hard-fought elections, heavy pressure on the King and the House of Lords, and the traumatic 'Days of May' when troops were armed in readiness for a revolution—the Whig Reform Act of 1832 was passed. Half a million men were eventually enfranchised in Britain and Ireland, new towns gained representation, aristocratic power was secured through 'reform in time'. 'It takes from [the peerage] a power which makes them odious, and substitutes for it an influence which connects them with the people', as Grey put it. 'It is of the utmost importance', he continued, 'to associate the middle with the higher orders of society in the love and support of the institutions and government of the country.'[4] At the same time the vote was formally declared male: every 'Male Person of full Age [i.e. fulfilling the restrictive franchise criteria] . . . shall . . . be entitled to vote.'[5] Many working-class radicals, supported throughout by Orator Hunt, refused to accept this measure, and the alienation of large numbers of those not enfranchised contributed directly to the emergence of Chartism in the late 1830s.

Jamaica. Jamaica was the largest and richest of the British Caribbean islands and figured most prominently in the debates over slavery. Once the slave trade had been abolished in 1807 it was hoped that slavery would die away, but it gradually became clear that this was not the case. A new initiative against slavery gained ground from the early 1820s, and thousands of men and women in Britain campaigned in a variety of ways—petitioning, producing propaganda material, organizing boycotts against sugar produced by the enslaved, calling meetings, and seeking to influence parliament. They argued that slavery was a stain on the nation and that emancipation was a moral imperative. Africans were constructed as piteous victims of a wicked system, pleading for help from their

[4] Grey to Princess Lieven, cited in M. Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London, 1973), p. 144.
[5] *An Act to amend the Representation of the People in England and Wales. 7 June 1832*, XXVII.

more powerful white brothers and sisters in the metropole. Fortunate Britons, blessed by the providential hand, must reach out to succour the oppressed. Women found in anti-slavery a cause with which they could readily identify: 'Remember those in bonds as bound with them, and them that suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body' ran the motto of the Female Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves.[6] This moral and religious cause allowed women to enlarge their sphere of public action in a society that looked disapprovingly on their claims for political citizenship. In the British West Indian colonies the enslaved struggled to free themselves, empowered by the ways in which they read the Bible and its story of exodus and redemption. In 1831 a major rebellion broke out in Jamaica, unleashing terrible retribution from the plantocracy. The planters believed that nonconformist missionaries were responsible (for how could Africans have led such a rebellion?) and persecuted them, burning their churches and chapels. The missionaries sought help from Britain and told the nation of the horrors of slavery and their hopes that benighted Africans, redeemed through Christ, would learn to be Christian men and women, industrious, domesticated, and free. Enslaved Africans would become men, 'their' wives and children secure under their patriarchal control. By 1830 anti-slavery supporters had realized that a reformed parliament represented their best hope of emancipation, for the West India interest relied on the pocket boroughs to secure their position in the House of Commons. In the wake of the 1831 rebellion campaigners used elections to seek assurances from candidates that they would support abolition. The 1832 Reform Act resulted in a reduction of parliamentary power for the planters and a recognition, even from landowners with significant interests in the Caribbean, that emancipation, provided there was compensation for their loss of 'property'—the enslaved—was the only way forward. Abolition in 1834 meant the beginning of 'the great experiment'—for Britain to see whether Africans could become effective free labourers.[7]

India. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the extension and consolidation of British control in India. At the same time that the conditions of emancipation from slavery—the degree of compensation and the extent of apprenticeship (the learning period in which

[6] *Female Society for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall and their Respective Neighbourhoods, for the Relief of British Negro Slaves, First Report* (Birmingham, 1826).
[7] For a longer version of this argument, see C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* (Cambridge, 2002).

Africans would 'learn to be men')—were being hotly contested in both Lords and Commons, a new Charter Act for India was also passing through its parliamentary process. From the late eighteenth century a balance of power between government and the East India Company had been ensured through a system of dual control, the conditions of which were set by Charter Acts every twenty years. The debate on the new Charter of 1833 attracted small audiences and no popular political action, though James Silk Buckingham had organized a series of lectures in 1829 against the renewal of the Company's charter of the East India Company monopoly on the China trade.[8] He found significant support in the manufacturing centres of the north-west and large numbers of petitions from provincial merchants argued for free trade.[9] The Act ended the East India Company monopoly on the China trade and effected a new settlement between the Company and the government, to the great advantage of the latter. All parties to the discussions over the Charter in Calcutta and London assumed that Britons must rule India: the only question was how. Representative government was right for Europe, as Macaulay argued in his presentation of the government's case to the House of Commons, for 'the materials of good government are everywhere ready to your hands. The people are everywhere competent . . . to hold some share of political power.' In India, however, 'you cannot have representative institutions'. 'We have to engraft on despotism those blessings which are the natural fruit of liberty'—the best government for India, a place suited to conquest, where men were effeminate and passive, was 'an enlightened and paternal despotism'.[10]

What then are the theoretical tools that can help us to understand this particular conjuncture in the history of nation and empire? A moment when manhood and freedom were yoked together in differentiated ways across metropole and colony. When Westminster legislated for Britain, Ireland, the Caribbean, and India. When the hierarchies of difference both within the nation and between nation and empire were being constituted and contested, when ethnic differences, class differences, racial differences, and gender differences were being produced and struggled over, and patterns of inclusion and exclusion were being fixed in legislation. What might Marx have to say about this moment?

[8] M. Taylor, 'Empire and Parliamentary Reform: The 1832 Reform Act Revisited', in A. Burns and J. Innes (eds), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 2003).
[9] C. H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784–1834* (Manchester, 1940).
[10] T. B. Macaulay, 'The Government of India', 10 July 1833, in *Speeches on Politics and Literature* (1854) (London, 1909), pp. 103–4, 123.

* * *

Marx arrived in England in 1849, an exile from the French and German revolutions of 1848, forced to make a new life in London. Deeply shocked by the failure of revolutionary hopes, his response was to significantly rework and rethink his earlier formulations about the relation between the political and the economic. In 1850 he began his analysis of the experience of 1848, turning from abstract theory to complex concrete analysis, from the simplification of classes which underpins the dramatic narrative of *The Communist Manifesto* to the many determinations of the essays on France. *The Class Struggles in France 1848–50* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, both concerned with the working-out of an expanded and revised materialist form of historical analysis, were the fruits of this work. Marx needed to understand why it was that the predictions of *The Communist Manifesto* had not borne fruit and what the relation was between class as a set of economic relations and how classes and class fractions acted politically. In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels had assumed an identity between economic and political classes but this was not adequate to an understanding of what had happened in France. How then did the relation work?

During the 1850s, as a spectator of the British political scene, Marx wrote a series of trenchant articles, particularly for the *New York Daily Tribune*, analysing contemporary politics and polemicizing against the hypocrisies and monstrosities of what he and Engels came to see as this 'most bourgeois of all nations'.[11] It is the writings of this period that I want to make particular use of. This is not to suggest that the more abstract analysis of *Capital* does not continue to be vital for historians. No one would seriously suggest that an understanding of the long nineteenth century can be separated from the development of the capitalist mode of production, or that Marx has not given us one of the best accounts of it. Rather, my point is to remind us of the ways in which Marx directed our attention to the centrality of *class* and of *colonialism* and the continuing salience of this analysis.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx confronted 'the paradox of a state power that appears not to express the rule of a social class at all, but to dominate civil society completely and to arbitrate class struggles from above'.[12] He shows how 'the *class struggle* in France created circumstances

[11] K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Britain*, 2nd edn (Moscow, 1962), p. 537.
[12] D. Fernbach, Introduction to his edited K. Marx, *Surveys from Exile* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 9.

and conditions which allowed a mediocre and grotesque individual to play the hero's role . . . Hegel remarks somewhere that all the great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce . . . Louis Blanc in place of Robespierre—the Nephew in place of the Uncle'.[13] It may seem surprising to find Marx concentrating on an individual—but this is not a theory of history premised on individual agency but rather the beginnings of a complex theory of representation. In his detailed account of the period from the revolution to the *coup d'état* he had to analyse not a ruling class, but a bloc with its many classes and class fractions, operating in a society where peasant and petty bourgeois production predominated. Yet that majority could not rule in their own name. He explored what he identified as the ideological disguises that were assumed and that made possible the substitution of a figurehead for a set of class relations and the mobilization of popular support. He insisted that political democracy was brought into being more by struggles between classes than by the supremacy of a unified class and its political expression. To imagine anything else, he argued with characteristic acerbity, was 'parliamentary cretinism'.[14] The divisions between the Orleanists and Legitimists, he demonstrated, were fundamentally differences of interest inside the upper bourgeoisie—the clash between high finance, trade, and industry on the one hand and landed property on the other. He pointed to the 'distinction between the phrases and fantasies of the parties and their real organization and real interests, between their conception of themselves and what they really are'.[15] France was a society still dominated by peasant proprietorship, each individual family almost self-sufficient and unable to see its connection with others—'much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes'. 'In so far as millions of families', he explained,

> live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their cultural formation from those of the other classes and bring them into conflict with those classes, they form a class. In so far as these small peasant proprietors are merely connected on a local basis, and the identity of their interest fails to produce a feeling of community, national links or a political organisation, they do not form a class. They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own names, whether

[13] K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Fernbach (ed.), *Surveys from Exile*, p. 146.
[14] Ibid., p. 210.
[15] Ibid., p. 174.

> through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.[16]

It was Bonaparte who assumed this power to represent.

What Marx showed in this analysis was the necessity of class analysis—but the way he does it shows that there was nothing automatic about what classes were, or the relation between the economic and the political.[17] His work on British politics in the 1850s made use of the new conceptual framework that he had developed in relation to France. Clearly the two societies were very different, since Britain was the home of modern industry and had a more developed class structure than France. But a class analysis was just as applicable as, for example, he demonstrated in his account of the different sectors of capital and their political representatives—Whigs and Tories. In a trenchant critique of Guizot's analysis of the English Revolution of 1688 he castigated the French statesman for his 'most inadequate and banal narration of mere political events'. Guizot failed to move beyond the level of the political and thus could not see that the success of the English Revolution was because of 'the permanent alliance between the bourgeoisie and the greater part of the big landlords' and that the subordination of kingship to parliament meant 'its subordination to the rule of a class'.[18] In his essay on Lord John Russell written in 1855, Marx spelt out his account of the 1832 Reform Act: an Act which he saw as propelled by a bourgeois reform movement but effected by the Whigs in order to secure their own predominance. 'The ejection of Wellington from office', he wrote,

> because he had declared against Reform; the French revolution of July; the threatening political unions formed by the middle and working classes at Birmingham, Manchester, London, and elsewhere; the rural war; the 'bonfires' all over the most fertile counties of England—all these circumstances absolutely compelled the Whigs to propose some measure of reform. It was their only means of rushing into office. They gave way grudgingly, slowly, and after vainly reiterated efforts at one time to shuffle out of the only liberal clauses of their own measure, and again to abandon it altogether, and to keep their places by a compromise with the Tories. They were prevented by the formidable attitude of the people, and the uncompromising opposition of the Tories. Hardly, however, had the Reform Bill become law, and begun to work, when, to quote Mr. Bright's words, 'the people began to feel

[16] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, in Fernbach (ed.), *Surveys from Exile*, p. 239.
[17] S. Hall, 'The "Political" and the "Economic" in Marx's Theory of Classes', in A. Hunt (ed.), *Class and Class Structure* (London, 1977), pp. 15–60.
[18] Marx, 'A Review of Guizot's Book "Why Has the English Revolution been Successful?"', in *On Britain*, pp. 344–50.

> that they had been cheated'. Never, perhaps, had such a mighty, and, to all appearances successful popular movement been turned into such a mock result. Not only were the working classes altogether excluded from any political influence, but the middle classes discovered that Lord Althorp, the soul of the Reform cabinet, had not used a rhetorical figure when telling his Tory adversaries that 'the Reform Act was the most aristocratic act ever offered to the nation'.[19]

Here were the classes and class fractions, the political garb donned to captivate the middle and working classes, the Whigs, 'the aristocratic representatives of the bourgeoisie', taking 'the movement in hand in order to prevent its forward march, and to recover their own posts at the same time', and the Tories, representing the landed aristocracy.[20] While some would now argue that one mistake of the British Marxist historians is that they focused too much on questions of class it remains vital to work on conceptions of class, as Marx continued to do, rather than take this dimension for granted. Especially perhaps since, paradoxically, *The Making of the English Working Class* has made an analysis that focuses on the transformation of a class 'in itself' to a class 'for itself' almost the common sense of our understanding of the early nineteenth century. But common sense can lose its salience and the reinvention of the wheel is sometimes timely. Central, then, to an understanding of the conjuncture of 1829–33—not just in relation to reform at home but to events in Ireland, Jamaica, and India—is an analysis of class relations, political ideologies, and questions of representation. This is Marx, but a Marx already revising himself, about classes which are no longer to be seen as unitary blocs, and whose forms of consciousness have a complex articulation to classes at the economic level, let alone to political representation.

What about Marx in relation to the other dimensions of the conjuncture? Understanding Britain's position in the world meant grasping the relation of capitalist development to colonial and foreign policies. In his writings on India, China, and Ireland, Marx (along with Engels, who had a particular interest in the latter) developed the rudiments of an analysis of the workings of colonialism that was later to be elaborated by Lenin. Critical to this was his perception of an interconnected world, linked by an early phase in the formation of a global market. 'The specific task of bourgeois society', he noted, 'is the establishment of a world market, at least in outline, and of production based upon this world market.'[21] It was

[19] Marx, 'Lord John Russell', in *On Britain*, pp. 451–2.
[20] Marx, 'The Elections in England—Tories and Whigs', in *On Britain*, pp. 351–7.
[21] Karl Marx to Frederick Engels, 8 October 1858, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Colonialism* (London, 1960), p. 282.

part of his method to trace the connections made by the traffic in commodities, whether opium or cotton. 'It may seem a very strange, and a very paradoxical assertion', he wrote in 1853, 'that the next uprising of the people of Europe, and their next movement for republican freedom and economy of government, may depend more probably on what is now passing in the Celestial Empire, than on any other political cause that now exists.'[22] In forcing opium on the Chinese, the British had destabilized the imperial regime. China might now send disorder into the Western world. Similarly, the systems of land tenure and taxation in India, which had produced widespread pauperization, were the feeding grounds for cholera: 'India's ravages upon the Western world—a striking and severe example of the solidarity of human woes and wrongs.'[23]

If Marx, unreferenced in the new global histories that trace the precursors of contemporary forms of globalization, was the first to conceptualize a global market driven by the imperatives of capital accumulation, he was also the first to posit a form of historical analysis which placed metropole and colony in one analytic frame. (Students are now referencing this as the insight of Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler.) The domestic and the colonial were, for him, two sides of the same coin—bourgeois civilization. This operated in one way at home, another in the empire. The 'so-called liberty of English citizens is based on the oppression of the colonies', wrote Engels in relation to Ireland, which he described as 'the first English colony'.[24] Indeed, Marx came to believe that anti-Irishness among English workers was a major obstacle to the development of a revolutionary politics in Britain, the 'secret by which the capitalist class maintained its power'.[25] 'The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation', wrote Marx on India (that 'Ireland of the East'), 'lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.'[26] In 1866, commenting on the reaction of the authorities to the demonstration at Hyde Park in favour of reform and comparing it with the brutality of the reaction to the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica, he wrote, 'that cur Knox [the magistrate] snaps out summary judgement in a way that shows what would happen if London were Jamaica'.[27] The link-

[22] Marx, 'Revolution in China and in Europe', in *On Colonialism*, p. 15.
[23] Marx, 'India', in *On Colonialism*, p. 75.
[24] Engels to Marx, 23 May 1856, in *On Britain*, p. 535.
[25] Marx to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, 9 April 1870, in *On Britain*, p. 301.
[26] Marx, 'The Future Results of the British Rule in India', in *On Britain*, pp. 404–5. India is described as 'the Ireland of the East' in 'The British Rule in India', in *On Britain*, p. 391.
[27] Marx to Engels, 27 July 1866, in *On Britain*, p. 541.

age between metropole and colony was based on exploitation—of raw materials, markets, and peoples. State power and military power were the tools facilitating capitalist ventures. The route out of this, for Marx, could only be through capitalism itself. The development of modern industry and the forms of class struggle associated with it would eventually bring revolution, including in the colonies. It didn't. Marxism in its more economic mode did not turn out to be an effective form of prediction—it was too general and too abstract—and neglected questions of difference, entangling Marx in forms of orientalism, to which, not having thought about 'race' and ethnicity, he was not sensitized. 'Hindostan', in Marx's terminology, had no history outside of conquest: 'what we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society'.[28] It was only modern societies that had histories in the proper sense of the term. India's culture was 'undignified and stagnatory', 'her' people lived 'a vegetative life . . . a passive sort of existence'.[29] Britain's modern industry was its virile power, impervious to the 'Hindooization' that had overtaken all previous conquerors. 'England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerative.'[30] With hindsight we know this was not the route taken: that successful anti-colonial struggles were waged in peasant societies and that new nations marked the end of one form of colonialism, the beginnings of another.

What then has so far been illuminated in relation to the conjuncture of 1828–33? Marx's analysis remains critical to an understanding of capital formation and class relations. His reflections and revisions on the relation between the economic and the political opened the way to the twentieth-century theorization of discrete levels within a social formation with their overdetermined articulation as well as further work on the significance of relative autonomy. This made possible later conceptualizations of ideology—from Gramsci on hegemony to Althusser's notion of interpellation and Foucault's discursive formations and regimes of truth. His insistence on the driving centrality of capital accumulation and global markets provides an account which has only now come into its own. His grasp of the interconnections of metropole and colony—whether in relation to Ireland, India, or Jamaica—provides a starting point for engagement with the webs of empire. While his focus was on the economic, the military, and the political, others were later to turn to questions of culture. It is

[28] Marx, 'The Future Results of the British Rule in India', pp. 399–400.
[29] Marx, 'The British Rule in India', p. 397.
[30] Marx, 'The Future Results of the British Rule in India', p. 400.

interesting to note that Said's classic text *Orientalism* has as its epitaph those words from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: 'they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented'. Said's task, utilizing the insights of Gramsci and Foucault, was to explore the forms of cultural imperialism and their salience in post-colonial times. While the European empires had been dismantled the modes of thought associated with colonial relations had not. Said's emphasis on colonial discourse and the ways in which European culture managed and produced 'the Orient' made possible a new attention to the workings of colonial discourse in many contexts. As post-colonial scholars have demonstrated, the political economy of colonialism does not make sense without an understanding of the ways in which relations of domination and subordination were lived. How were colonizers and colonized made? How were these boundaries constantly transgressed? What did terms such as 'freedom' or 'emancipation' or 'labour' or 'indenture' mean in particular historical circumstances?

While post-colonial scholars have necessarily engaged to a greater or lesser extent with Marx (and indeed there is an extensive and argumentative literature on this) feminists found no such genealogy. Marx's class analysis was gender blind and later Marxist historians did little to redress this. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* included material on a few women but, unsurprisingly, given that it was published in the early 1960s, did not see the significance of gender to the making of class.[31] Yet as the women's movement in Britain developed from the late 1960s, it was in intense dialogue with Marxism. Feminist history was closely associated with a left profoundly influenced by Marxism, and in the 1970s and 1980s efforts were made to work with and then to modify Marxian class analysis by attending to questions of the sexual division of labour, of the organization of the household, and of reproduction. Engels' reflections on property and patriarchy only took us so far and new concepts were essential to address the questions we wanted answers to. The emergence of the category gender as a tool of historical analysis made it possible to begin to see that gender was as constitutive of social relations as class. The constant work of 'making' men and women, transforming sexed bodies into particular kinds of people with attributes seen as natural, was, and is, critical to economic, social, political, cultural, and psychic life. The inequalities of gender are as hard to shift as those of any other social axis of power. And gender, of course, always intersects with other hierarchies of difference—whether those of class, ethnicity, 'race', or any other.

[31] For a trenchant critique of Thompson for his gender blindness, see J. W. Scott, 'Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*', in her collection, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988).

As an historian of the nineteenth century my own focus is now on the articulation of *difference* as one key to political and social formations and cultural identities. The differences between manliness and effeminacy, between Irishness and Englishness, between Catholic and Protestant, between the African and the Indian, between the mental labourer and the manual labourer, between men who could be political citizens and women who could not, all of these imagined differences provided the discursive frames through which relations of knowledge and power were articulated. Yet the cultural work of *making difference*, producing what Cooper and Stoler call 'the grammar of difference', the hierarchies of power between colonizer and colonized, or men and women, or employer and employee, requires the unceasing and interminable efforts to fix binaries which can never be fixed.[32] And this discursive work is always produced in relation to and is constitutive of relations of production and exchange while these very relations of production and exchange are built upon and grounded in relations of gender, ethnicity, and 'race'.

Let me return to my conjuncture and briefly indicate some of the implications of my analysis for each of the four sites.

Ireland. It is not possible to grasp the moment of Catholic emancipation outside of the categories of gender and ethnicity. While class played a part, for the Protestant Ascendancy was a class formation as well as an ethnic one, class antagonisms, whether in relation to England or Ireland, were only one aspect of the multiple grievances of Irish Catholics. The Union of 1801 meant the abolition of the Dublin parliament and the representation of the Irish at Westminster. Pitt hoped for an end to religious strife and internal improvements with an influx of English capital. The Catholic case for supporting the Union had always been Pitt's promise of emancipation and the assumption that the British Parliament would be more sympathetic to this than the Irish had ever been. But after the bloody conflicts of 1798 the Union 'was universally interpreted as annexation'.[33] There was deep disillusionment with the Union in Ireland as it became clear that the Anglo-Irish Protestant gentry were ruling through Dublin Castle—'England's Garrison'. The Ascendancy rebuffed the claims of the 'mere Irish' and continued to hold all positions of power. Supported by Tory governments they fuelled a sense of otherness that encouraged a

[32] F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in their edited collection, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), p. 4.

[33] D. Fitzpatrick, 'Ireland and the Empire', in A. Porter (ed.), *The Nineteenth Century*, Oxford History of the British Empire (Oxford, 2000), p. 495.

powerful binary. Ireland could be ruled as an 'enemy country', and the native Irish were not 'like us'. Ireland might have a white population, be geographically proximate, and politically united to Britain, but it was ruled as a 'metropolitan colony', both inside and outside the United Kingdom. The administration was 'distinctively colonial in both form and function' with direct rule under a lord lieutenant, a remarkable degree of centralization and inspection, and measures of repression and coercion that would have been unthinkable in Britain, for efficiency in government in Ireland 'was valued above the liberty of the subject and the sanctity of property'.[34] Peel was often moved to beg the House of Commons to remember that Ireland was not England. In this context, Thomas Bartlett argues, Catholics, both men and women, gradually came to think of themselves as 'the people of Ireland'.[35]

'The people of Ireland' were mobilized in the Catholic Association, a movement led by men and seeking male rights, but with large numbers of female supporters. O'Connell was successful in articulating a sense of grievance, the feeling that Ireland was 'an inferior nation' and that the Irish should know their wrongs and assert their rights. As one witness put it to the select committee of 1825, the Catholics 'feel that they are of the inferior nation: and this sense of inferiority is kept in a state of perpetual inflammation by the constant discussion of the Catholic question'.[36] O'Connell's charisma—rooted in a profoundly masculinist and patriarchal self-presentation—was critical to the movement's success. A dauntless and brilliant orator, he was swaggering, loud mouthed, abusive, boastful, assertive, courageous, defiant, willing to fight duels—a man who could stand up to England and the English. He was both an Irish landlord, with family estates in Kerry going back for generations, and a professional man, a barrister. He was both feudal lord and modern man—standing for Ireland, a nation constituted as Catholic, but for an Ireland that could be proud of itself. He could personify Hibernia, mobilize men for the cause, and welcome women as admiring dependents. 'O'Connell is of the people', wrote a French traveller: 'He is a mirror in which Ireland sees herself complete, or rather, he is Ireland herself.'[37] But as O'Connell

[34] Fitzpatrick, 'Ireland and the Empire', p. 496.
[35] T. Bartlett, *The Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question 1690–1830* (Dublin, 1992), p. 342.
[36] Ibid., p. 340.
[37] Cited in J. A. Reynolds, *The Catholic Emancipation Crisis in Ireland, 1823–1829* (1954) (Westport, CT, 1970), p. 37.

knew, a united Ireland must include Protestants as well as Catholics: emancipation must be the prelude to this. Furthermore, while his vision of Ireland was both national and cosmopolitan, it was also of a country much more English. O'Connell was the man who could complete Ireland through full union with England. His lifelong oscillation, as Oliver MacDonagh argues, was between his attempts to create a united Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, and his attempts to collaborate with British Whigs, liberals, and radicals.[38] He was a committed constitutionalist with a powerful belief in individual rights and the absolute civil equality of every adult male. He could do business with England.

In 1825 an Irish deputation went to England to protest against Goulburn's Bill to suppress the Catholic Association. Richard Lalor Sheil, O'Connell's associate leader in the Catholic Association, wrote a journalistic account of this in which he constructed O'Connell as the manly Irishman who could save Ireland by full union with England. Sheil noted that 'the moment we entered England . . . the sense of our own national importance had sustained some diminution'. The 'splendid spectacle of English wealth and civilisation', the signs of 'British power and greatness, impressed upon every one of us the conviction of our provincial inferiority'. 'Compared to her proud and pampered sister', he continued, 'clothed as she is in purple and in gold, Ireland, with all her natural endowments, at best appears but a squalid and emaciated beauty.' It was O'Connell who could save them from this sense of inferiority. As he travelled through England sitting on the box of his barouche, he attracted the public gaze with his 'open and manly physiognomy', draped in a huge cloak that 'seemed to be a revival of the famous Irish mantle', and his tones 'earnest and sonorous', indicating a gravitas and weight suited to England. O'Connell 'seemed half English at Shrewsbury, and was nearly Saxonized when we entered the murky magnificence of Warwickshire'. This was a man who could conduct himself in such a way as to win respect: he could not be accused of being uncivilized. He would be able to lead his country to an 'intimate alliance' with England, effect a 'complete amalgamation with her immense dominion'. Ireland was the poor sister, England the seat of power. Sheil's language of sexual surrender suggested frustrated manhood, for the 'real and consummated junction of the two countries' would enable Ireland 'to receive the ample overflowings of that deep current of opulence which we saw almost bursting through its

[38] O. MacDonagh, *The Hereditary Bondsman: Daniel O'Connell 1775–1829* (London, 1988), p. 104.

golden channels in the streets of the immense metropolis'.[39] Only union with England could make Irish men fully men.

The Catholic Association, in Sheil's words, itself provided 'a lesson in manliness': and it was this which made possible 'the great work of liberation'.[40] The Catholic rent, O'Connell's inspired idea as to how to raise money, and more significantly raise consciousness, was critical. The rent was to be paid primarily by 'steady men who are good sons, good brothers, good husbands', but women were also asked for contributions.[41] After the first suppression of the Catholic Association, O'Connell believed it was necessary to 'rouse in Ireland a spirit of action' and the decision was taken to fight elections and mobilize the 40 shilling freeholders (admitted to the franchise in 1793), previously seen as hopelessly subject to their landlords. By 1826 Peel was wondering 'how to grant emancipation in such a way as to preserve the Protestant interest in Ireland'.[42] 'I am quite certain', wrote Lord Lieutenant Anglesey, that 'O'Connell and Sheil could lead on the people to open rebellion at a moment's notice'.[43] After the County Clare election Sheil wrote triumphantly:

> We are masters of the passions of the people and we have employed our dominion with terrible effect ... seven millions of Irish people are completely arrayed and organized ... Did you mark our discipline, our subordination, our good order ...[44]

It was this discipline and good order that was the key: it demonstrated that the Irish were men, and deserved freedom.

By 1828, Wellington was convinced that the government would either have to give way or use coercion on a scale 'unknown in the ordinary practice of the constitution'.[45] Such coercion was a matter of course in India or Jamaica—but Ireland was a somewhat different matter. Despite the clear lack of enthusiasm for emancipation in England the British government was prepared to grant it on pragmatic grounds. Wellington hoped at the same time to crush the Catholic Association and end the

[39] R. L. Sheil, 'The Catholic Deputation', in *Legal and Political Sketches*, ed. M. W. Savage, 2 vols (London, 1855), I, pp. 21, 27–31. Thanks to Robert Priest for the point about sexual grammar.
[40] Cited in F. O'Farrell, *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy 1820–1830* (Dublin, 1985), p. 51.
[41] O'Connell to Revd Michael Slattery, 2 September 1828, cited in MacDonagh, *The Hereditary Bondsman*, p. 260.
[42] Cited in Bartlett, *The Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation*, p. 335.
[43] Cited in Reynolds, *The Catholic Emancipation Crisis*, p. 154.
[44] Ibid., p. 159.
[45] Ibid., p. 165.

threat from the 40 shilling freeholders. There was already a risk that what had happened in Ireland would incite trouble in England. When disenfranchisement was proposed Irish tenants were depicted as incapable of making their own judgements—they were under the influence of either their landlord, or, as in the recent elections, their priests. Unlike 40 shilling freeholders in England—sturdy, free-born Protestant men deemed capable of political citizenship—Irish Catholics were seen as less than fully men: for manliness connoted independence from the will of others.[46] When proposing the removal of the vote from some 84,000 Irish men (which O'Connell was forced to concede) Peel argued that this was a small matter in comparison with the removal of the stigma associated with Catholicism. Now Catholics could 'stand erect on the footing of perfect equality'. Those Irish Protestants who were also disqualified were comforted by Peel with the reflection that while 'overborn by a herd of voters, the voice of each of whom is equal to yours' their votes could not carry their due weight.[47] Thus was the grammar of difference, between Irish and English, Catholic and Protestant, man and woman, articulated.

Britain. While categories of class are critical to the political reformation of the nation in 1832, so too are categories of gender. For it was men who claimed inclusion in the political nation: and the burning question was which men were worthy of the vote and how should the lines be drawn. The end of the Napoleonic wars saw the revival of radicalism and a new insistence among reforming Whigs and Utilitarians of the necessity for a reform of the franchise. In James Mill's classic *Essay on Government*, published in 1819, an essay which kick-started a lively debate on political citizenship, the question of women's enfranchisement had been summarily dismissed. 'One thing is pretty clear', wrote Mill, 'that all those individuals whose interests are indisputably included in those of other individuals, may be struck off without inconvenience.' All children were represented by their parents and women too could be regarded in this light, 'the interest of almost all of whom is involved either in that of their fathers or in that of their husbands'. At the same time he sang a paean of praise to middle-class men, 'the class which is universally described as both the most wise and the most virtuous part of the community', which gave its distinguished ornaments to science, art, and legislation, and which was 'the chief source of all that has exalted and refined human

[46] On manliness as independence in early nineteenth-century England, see L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (London, 1987).
[47] *Hansard*, New Series XX, February–March 1829, col. 772.

nature'.[48] Mill's *Essay* provoked an angry response from the Owenite feminists Anna Wheeler and William Thompson who demolished Mill's argument step by step and argued for women's right to political citizenship.[49] But such appeals made little headway in a society in which formal politics connoted masculinity.

Women undoubtedly played a part in the reform debates of 1830–2 but that part was on the sidelines. Elite women attempted to exercise influence through their salons, packed themselves into the space behind the curtains in the House of Lords to listen to debates, waited anxiously at home for news of critical votes, and were requested to use their feminine wiles to secure the presence of peers who might otherwise prefer to stay in the country.[50] Women's access to informal networks in town and country, the semi-public spaces of country houses and rectories, gave them opportunities to voice opinions and exercise preferences. As writers they could attempt to intervene in matters politic, though to write publicly (rather than in diary or letter form) on the concerns of high politics was most unusual. Women landowners exerted pressure on their tenants to vote for their preferred candidates as did Anne Lister in Yorkshire, who worked hard on behalf of the Tories.[51] Yet she considered the idea of allowing women to become members of the body politic 'an absurdity'.[52] Elite and middle-class women, conclude Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, 'did possess the potential for political influence: whether derived from their sexuality or their social status, their electoral practices or their sheer physical force'.[53] But influence was one thing: the right to vote quite another. Women were named as subjects not citizens in the Reform Act of 1832 and it was not until 1866 that the question of women's suffrage was taken even moderately seriously at Westminster.

[48] J. Mill, *An Essay on Government* (1819) (Cambridge, 1937), pp. 45, 71–2.

[49] W. Thompson, *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* (1825) (London, 1983).

[50] Lady Leconfield and J. Gore (eds), *Three Howard Sisters*; on the attempts by men to ask women to exercise their influence, see, for example, the Duke of Wellington to Lady Shelley, London, 1 October 1831; both in E. A. Smith (ed.), *Reform or Revolution? A Diary of Reform in England 1830–1832* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 85–90. Such overtures were not always welcomed; see Charles Greville's Journal, ibid., p. 85.

[51] J. Liddington, *Family Fortune: Land, Gender and Authority. The Anne Lister Diaries and Other Writings* (London, 1998).

[52] Cited in S. Richardson, 'The Role of Women in Electoral Politics in Yorkshire during the 1830s', *Northern History*, XXXII (1996), p. 138.

[53] K. Gleadle and S. Richardson, 'The Petticoat in Politics: Women in Authority', in their edited volume, *Women in British Politics, 1760–1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 14.

The realm of popular politics was also dominated by men and the claims of men. In the agricultural disturbances in Kent and the south-east that heralded the crisis over reform it was men who were active, using the threat of violence to give weight to their anger. In the industrial towns and cities, as artisans and tradesmen began to organize for parliamentary reform it was understood as a weighty business; one suited to serious and responsible persons. The Birmingham Political Union, the organization inspired by the example of the Catholic Association to mobilize for reform, took as its slogan

> We raise the watchword, Liberty
> We will, we will, we will be free.[54]

It was the freedom of men to be represented that they sought, as did the many political unions that followed their model, seeing organization as vital to making their voices heard. Free born Englishmen were enslaved to the aristocracy: they must assert their right to liberty. It was manhood, not property, that should define the right to political citizenship. 'Instead of bricks, mortar and dirt', they argued, MAN ought to be represented.[55] Associations of working men proliferated, anxious to establish their industry and sobriety, their right, therefore, to political freedom.[56] Women, it was assumed, would support the claims of their men. Even those who were indefatigable in their demand for universal male suffrage, a demand that many reformers were willing to forego in order to get a measure of change, did not aspire to extend this privilege to women. Orator Hunt, the most popular figure in radical politics in the early nineteenth century, a handsome, athletic, ex-gentleman farmer, presented himself in characteristically masculinist language as 'John Bull's Watchman'.[57] He recognized that men were locked in 'political slavery' for he contended that 'the only difference between political liberty and political slavery was this,—he who has a share in making the laws which affect his person, his property, and his life, is a free man; he who has not a share in making them, is a slave'.[58] In recognition of this he was prepared to present the petition of Mary Smith to the House of Commons in

[54] Cited in A. Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (London, 1959), p. 257.
[55] Cited in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), p. 827.
[56] See, for example, W. Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett: In His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, with some short Account of the different associations he belonged to & of the Opinions he entertained* (1876) (London, 1967).
[57] J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-class Radicalism* (Oxford, 1985), p. 255.
[58] *Hansard*, Series III, March–April 1831, cols 18–19.

August 1832, asking for the vote for 'every unmarried woman having that pecuniary qualification whereby the other sex is entitled to the said franchise'.[59] William Cobbett, however, was probably closer to majority opinion among the radicals when he argued that women were excluded from the right to vote because 'husbands are answerable in law for their wives, as to their civil damages, and because the very nature of their sex makes the exercise of this right incompatible with the harmony and happiness of society'.[60] By nature, it was claimed, the female sex were unsuited to the public sphere.

Jamaica. The classic Marxist studies of the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean have not addressed questions of gender, yet gender was critical both to the practices of the plantation and the winning of emancipation.[61] Abolition became politically expedient once it was clear that the system was vulnerable, on account of both resistance and questions of economic viability. The major rebellion in Jamaica in 1831 concentrated the metropolitan mind, and the struggle as to what constituted 'the truth' of slavery intensified as missionary reports of the scale of brutality and persecution competed with the stories circulated by the plantocracy of happy and contented Africans, whose conditions were infinitely preferable to those of poor British labourers. The anti-slavery movement was born of the evangelical revival. A system which did not allow the enslaved to hear the message of Christianity and practise the faith was utterly immoral. Furthermore, the wickedness of slavery was intimately associated, in the anti-slavery imagination, with the impossibility of a decent Christian family life, the refusal of proper forms of manhood and femininity to enslaved Africans, and the depraved and degraded sexual practices that characterized the lives of Britons who left the island shores. Mary Prince, the Antiguan woman who managed to escape from her master and mistress once in London and, under the aegis of the Anti-Slavery Society, published her story in 1831, played on this sentiment in her efforts to mobilize Britons against slavery. She recounted, as delicately as possible in the interests of her genteel audience, the sexual claims made upon her by a variety of masters and drew attention to the gap between metropole and colony. She was often 'much vexed', she wrote, at the claim that 'slaves are happy' and 'do not want to be free'. 'Is it happiness for a

[59] *Journal of the House of Commons* (1832), LXXXVII, p. 551.
[60] W. Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men* (1830) (Oxford, 1980), p. 317.
[61] E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1944); R. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776–1848* (London, 1988); T. C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore, MD, 1992).

driver in the field to take down his wife, or sister, or child, and strip them, and whip them in such a disgraceful manner?' 'There is no modesty or decency shown by the owner to his slaves', she continued:

> Men, women, and children are exposed alike. Since I have been here I have often wondered how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner. But when they go to the West Indies, they forget God and all feeling of shame.[62]

Abolitionists were horrified by the effects of slavery on both victims and oppressors. They looked for not just the ending of a pernicious system of labour. Rather they hoped for a new moral universe, one with a proper gender order where men could be fully men, and women fully women. Such a vision depended on an evangelical understanding of the social and political order: a Christian household with the father at its helm and the mother presiding over the home and caring for husband and children must provide the basis for stability.

Not all abolitionists were evangelicals, but even those with a more secular vision saw the distortion of family relations as critical to the horrors of slavery. 'A black man must be first a slave and then a man', says the young African Willie in Harriet Martineau's anti-slavery tale *Demerara*. 'A white woman has nobody to rule her but her husband, and nobody can hurt her without his leave; but a slave's wife must obey her master before her husband; and he cannot save her from being flogged.'[63] This sense of a world turned upside down, of men denied their rights as men and unable to protect their wives—from the unwanted attentions of their white masters, was a potent force fuelling the anti-slavery movement. When thousands of Birmingham abolitionists gathered to celebrate the winning of emancipation in 1834, they cheered to the rafters as John Scoble, Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, reminded his audience that 'Yesterday his fellow-Christians and fellow-men, to the number of many thousands, were held the property of other men.' But today, he continued, 'they were their own property—husbands could embrace their wives as their own property, and slavery, with all its gloomy and revolting features, was at an end he trusted for ever'.[64]

[62] M. Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave: Related by Herself* (1831), ed. M. Ferguson (London, 1987), p. 83.
[63] H. Martineau, *Demerara* (1832), in D. Logan (ed.), *Harriet Martineau on Empire*, 5 vols (London, 2004), I, p. 100.
[64] Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Proceedings of the Great Anti-slavery Meeting held at the Town Hall Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1835), p. 16.

There would have been many women in that audience, though probably sitting in the galleries rather than the main body of the hall, and certainly not speaking on the platform. Anti-slavery was an issue that large numbers of women, mainly but not only middle-class, took to their hearts. Women led the call for full abolition, organized on behalf of their less fortunate 'sisters', as they named the unnamed African women whose cause they espoused. In the process they empowered themselves, arguing that since slavery was a moral cause it was one on which women could speak, write, and take action. While their husbands, fathers, and brothers were struggling for the vote these women were meeting in their own homes, writing pamphlets, organizing petitions, and visiting door-to-door in an effort to persuade consumers not to eat sugar produced by the enslaved.[65]

Emancipation was heralded as the 'birth' of the African man, for an enslaved man could not possess that independence that characterized full manhood. Apprenticeship, the system that was to persuade the plantocracy, alongside the compensation of twenty millions, to accept the ending of slavery, was the period in which Africans would learn to be men. Africans were seen as children, needing to be taught the ways of civilization. Africa had no culture and the minds of apprentices were ready for inscription. The men must learn how to work regularly for wages, develop tastes for 'artificial wants', be educated in the support of their families. The aim was to make them into 'fit and proper persons' with the hope that eventually they might be ready for the vote. Radical abolitionists, such as the Baptist missionary William Knibb, hoped that a judicious system of land purchase and the establishment of 'free villages' in which men such as himself would act as mentors for the newly freed, would ensure that black men would soon be able to exercise political citizenship and break the entrenched power of the plantocracy. Jamaica, he believed, had a future as a black society.[66] In the halcyon days of abolitionism in the early 1830s the Colonial Office certainly expected that eventually black men would vote in large numbers. It was only in the years that followed, as Thomas Holt has shown, that as racial thinking hardened in the metropole, successive moves were made to limit the black vote and ensure the continued dominance of white men.[67] Women, meanwhile, were to become proper wives and mothers, caring for their husbands and children, cooking proper family meals that all would sit down to,

[65] C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1992).
[66] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, esp. chs 1 and 2.
[67] Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*.

keeping their new homes clean and tidy, abandoning their gaudy clothes for modest attire. Freedom from the shackles of slavery was clearly coded according to sex.[68]

India. A consideration of the Charter Act of 1833 again demonstrates the need for an analysis of 'race' and of gender alongside that of class and capitalist development. At one level the Act represented the triumph of what was to be the liberal reforming state and of free trading interests against that of the monopolistic East India Company: an appropriate Act for a newly reformed Parliament and one that was more attentive to middle-class interests. The proposal to open up access to East India Company positions on the basis of competition also indicated something of a shift in the balance of class power. The concern that British 'newcomers' might include 'profligate adventurers' with a propensity to turn into 'new Brahmins' who would treat 'natives' with tyranny and intolerance reflected the anxieties of an established ruling class recognizing that power would have to be shared with men who were not educated as gentlemen.[69]

Yet an attention to the discursive frame of debates over India indicates the centrality of issues of 'race', religion, and gender to British conceptions of this other place of empire. By the early 1830s the idea of India as a site of 'thick darkness' which would be brought into the light of civilization by British rule had circulated widely.[70] From the first publication of Charles Grant's *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* in 1797 a new evangelical discourse of heathenism and depravity began to compete with Orientalist accounts. Grant argued that it was Britain's duty to take the Christian religion to the 'lamentably degenerate and base ... people of Hindostan'. This 'race of men' 'governed by malevolent and licentious passions', and with a 'feeble sense of moral obligation' had been morally corrupted by their superstitions. The despotic dominion of the Brahmins had destroyed individual autonomy. Like Irish Catholics or Africans in the Caribbean, Hindu men were not really men since the man 'who is dependent on the will of another ... thinks and acts as a degraded being'.[71] The treatise was

[68] For an account of the gendering of punishment both before and after emancipation, see D. Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780–1870* (Durham, NC, 2004).

[69] Macaulay, 'The Government of India', p. 117.

[70] The phrase is Macaulay's in his speech on India, p. 125.

[71] C. Grant, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with Respect to Morals and on the Means of Improving it. Written chiefly in Year 1792* (privately printed, 1797), pp. 71, 74.

published as a parliamentary paper both in 1813 and 1832, to inform the debates over the renewal of the Charter. In 1813 William Wilberforce echoed his Clapham neighbour Grant in arguing for freedom for missionary work and money for education: he looked forward, he said, with confidence in the 'vast superiority' of British institutions, to the day when the Indian community would have exchanged its 'dark and bloody superstitions' for 'Christian light and truth . . . social pleasures and domestic comforts'.[72]

In the debates over sati, mobilized by the Charter renewal of 1813, the figure of the oppressed Hindu widow, forced onto the pyre by the greed and cruelty of her male relatives, became a potent symbol for the legitimacy of British colonial power.[73] Hindu women had to be protected from the barbarisms and cruelties of their men who forced them not only into premature death but also into child marriages, sexual slavery, and other forms of degradation. The British would both protect Indian women and teach some Indian men how to be men. James Mill's *History of British India*, published in 1818 to significant acclaim, 'attempted to define an idiom for the British empire as a whole which would replace the dominant conservative one'.[74] This was a liberal programme that would emancipate India from its own culture. Mill relentlessly reiterated the 'facts' of Hindu superstition, this time from a Utilitarian perspective, and insisted on the low status of women as a key index of barbarism. 'Among rude people, the women are generally degraded', he pontificated, 'among civilised people they are exalted.'[75] Reform was essential: crucially this meant reform of the systems of law, government, and administration.

By the late 1820s the question of the renewal of the Charter was again coming up but the intense preoccupation with reform of the franchise and anti-slavery meant that there was relatively little interest beyond those with something specific to gain or lose. East Indian representation in the House of Commons was significantly reduced after the Reform Act, and the governing body of the Company was weak and divided.[76] Charles

[72] *Substance of the Speeches of William Wilberforce Esq., on the Clause in the East India Bill for Promoting the Religious Instruction and Moral Improvement of the Natives of the British Dominions in India, on the 22nd June and the 11th & 12th July 1813* (London, 1813), pp. 92–3.

[73] L. Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley, CA, 1998); C. Midgley, 'From Supporting Missions to Petitioning Parliament: British Women and the Evangelical Campaign against Sati in India, 1813–30', in Gleadle and Richardson (eds), *Women in British Politics*.

[74] J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* (Oxford, 1992), p. 4.

[75] J. Mill, *The History of British India*, 2 vols (1818) (New York, 1968), pp. 309–10.

[76] Philips, *The East India Company*.

Grant Junior was president of the Board of Control, and relied heavily on Macaulay to draft the new Charter, negotiate with the Court of Directors, and represent the case to the House of Commons. Grant was a weak man, Macaulay confided to his sister, 'his is a mind that cannot stand alone . . . a feminine mind . . . it turns like ivy to some support'.[77] Macaulay's speech, widely praised, argued the case for the ending of the China monopoly and an increase of power for the government's Board of Control and the governor-general in India at the expense of the Company. The preconceptions of his father Zachary's generation, Grant Senior and Wilberforce, were very apparent in some of his formulations. The Company had saved a country from dissipation. It had found a 'mock sovereign' in Delhi, 'suffered to indulge in every sensual pleasure . . . adored with servile prostrations . . . surrounded by fawning eunuchs', and a society in chaos. 'All the evils of despotism, and all the evils of anarchy, pressed at once on that miserable race.' The British had reconstructed a 'decomposed society', they had 'established order where we found confusion'. There were regrets about some aspects of those early days, but now there was a 'paternal feeling' to government and 'the morality, the philosophy, the taste of Europe were beginning to produce a salutary effect on the hearts and understandings of our subjects'. He looked forward to the day when 'a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition' would become 'desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens'.[78]

Rammohun Roy, Bengali social reformer, visited London in 1832 to give evidence to the Select Committee of the House of Commons on East Indian affairs, prior to the debates on the Charter renewal. Roy had published a tract on sati in 1818 arguing that the ancient scriptures did not advocate this practice. As Lata Mani has suggested, the critique of sati by Indian reformers became a way of asserting what was defined as 'traditional' communal authority, authority which should be held by men. When Governor-General Bentinck prohibited sati in 1829, Roy thanked him for protecting Hindu women, and for rescuing the character of Hindu men 'from the gross stigma . . . as wilful murderers of females'.[79] Some Hindu men could benefit from this, becoming the new agents of modernity, the privileged native informants who could mediate between Britain and India. Roy was lionized on his visit to England, becoming the

[77] Cited in G. O. Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (London, 1881), p. 251.
[78] Macaulay, 'The Government of India', pp. 109, 110, 111, 126.
[79] Cited in B. Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago, IL, 2004), p. 173.

Englishmen's Indian, the perfect colonial subject, welcoming in his concluding comments to the Select Committee further settlement of Britons in India. Roy 'was both speaking subject and mouthpiece for his culture, religion, and class . . . a testimony to the success of British rule, of its ability to make the natives over into imaged products of English civilization'.[80] As such he provides an icon for this conjuncture: when the making of new kinds of men across both metropolitan and colonial sites was a central component of the construction of a new vision of nation and empire.

* * *

The meanings of 'manhood', 'freedom', 'emancipation', and 'representation' were sites of contestation across metropole and colony in this period. Catholic emancipation gave Irish Catholic men civil equality, but did not challenge the inequalities between what it meant to be English and what it meant to be Irish. The 1832 Reform Act left working-class men and all women in 'a state of political slavery'. The abolition of colonial slavery made African men, infantilized by their chattel status, into apprentices who could learn to be men but could not yet be political citizens. 'Their' women would now be free to learn proper forms of femininity, domesticity, and obedience to the patriarchal authority of their fathers, husbands, and brothers rather than being subject to the sexual predilections of their masters. The 1833 Charter Act legislated for millions of Indian subjects on the assumption that they could not yet exercise freedom: they must stand, for generations if need be, in the waiting-room of history.[81] Western commerce and civilization, facilitated by a form of paternalistic despotism, must emancipate Indian men from their own passivity and effeminacy, their incapacity to care for their womenfolk. Meanwhile those same enlightened despots would free Hindu and Muslim women from the barbarisms of their faith. A number of educated and westernized brown men, drawn from the upper reaches of Indian society, would be partially welcomed into the colonial fold.

Marx, I argue, even on the basis of the very limited set of writings upon which I have drawn, provides a necessary but not sufficient set of tools with which to grasp the conjuncture that I have described. Fifteen years ago this would have been a strange exercise indeed, for British

[80] Cited in Joseph, *Reading the East India Company*, p. 175.
[81] This is Dipesh Chakrabarty's felicitous phrase, in *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), p. 8.

social historians would have assumed a vocabulary of class. In this new century, however, graduate students cannot understand why they should have to return to the writings of someone they see as irrelevant and 'old hat' for an understanding of the contemporary or the historical world. Similarly, many historians act as if living in a 'post-Marxist world' means that we can forget the ways of thinking that Marx developed. It is therefore worth reiterating that Marx's insights, and the ways they have been worked on and developed by subsequent thinkers, provide powerful tools for critical historical analysis. Yet the conjuncture of 1829–33 demands different forms of historical analysis—those derived from Marx and from feminist, post-structuralist, and post-colonial theory. Our twenty-first-century world is indeed one world, as Marx saw, but the world he saw was one without difference. Without these genealogies certain critical historical connections cannot be made. The ghost of Marx is still necessarily with us. Marx needs those Others and those Others need him.

6.
Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*: A Theory of History or a Theory of Communism?

GARETH STEDMAN JONES

What was the aim of Marx's theory? Did he succeed in establishing what he set out to prove? Posthumous commentary beginning with Engels has presented a picture of Marx which from the beginning has been somewhat out of focus. Speaking at Marx's graveside in 1883, Engels began by referring to Darwin who discovered 'the law of the development of organic nature upon our planet'. He then went on to claim that 'Marx is the discoverer of the fundamental law according to which human history moves and develops itself'.[1]

But if taken to define Marx's original project, these citations are misleading. Engels in 1883 had his own reasons for attributing to Marx the discovery of this 'fundamental law' of history. From the 1870s, Engels had found himself addressing a new generation of radicals and socialists, formed neither by Hegel nor by the so-called 'utopian socialists', but by Darwin, Lange, Haeckel, Comte, Spencer, Buckle, and Taine. Across Europe, these thinkers were admired by young intellectuals as the champions of evolution and the practitioners of the new positivist science of society. The unfinished manuscript of his *Dialectics of Nature* demonstrates that Engels spent much of his free time in the 1870s and 1880s collecting material which could prove that all the new scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century were 'historical'. Thereby, Marx's work would be placed within a firmly scientific context.[2]

[1] F. Engels, 'Draft of a Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx', *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (henceforth *MECW*), 50 vols (London, 1975–2005), XXIV, p. 463.

[2] 'It is ... from the history of nature and human society that the laws of dialectics are abstracted. For they are but the most general laws of these two stages of historical development, as well as of thought itself': F. Engels in 'Dialectics of Nature: Articles and Chapters', *MECW*, XXV, p. 356 and see p. 327.

The chance to make some use of the material he had gathered and at the same time capture the enthusiasm of this new constituency came in 1877, when Engels entered into controversy with Eugen Dühring, a positivist lecturer at the University of Berlin with a cult following among Social Democrats. *Anti-Dühring* was not only a polemic, but an encyclopaedic survey.[3] Engels covered not simply class struggle and the Marxian view of exploitation, capitalism, and socialism, but also ranged over nature, philosophical method, and man's place in the cosmos. With its claim that socialism had been transformed from a 'utopia' into a 'science', *Anti-Dühring* became the first work to bring Marx's theory to a large audience. It was in many ways the founding moment of *Marxism*.[4] Engels' graveside speech reinforced this construction.

For most of the twentieth century, Engels' depiction of Marx's achievement as the discovery of 'laws' of history was standardly followed by disciples and opponents alike. According to Isaiah Berlin writing in 1939, Marx believed that 'human history was governed by laws which cannot be altered by the mere intervention of individuals actuated by this or that ideal'. His faith in his own synoptic vision 'was of that boundless, absolute kind which puts an end to all questions and dissolves all difficulties'. 'His intellectual system was a closed one, everything that entered was made to conform to a pre-established pattern, but it was grounded in observation and experience.'[5]

But around the end of the First World War, among a minority of revolutionary intellectuals, this reading of Marx as a positivist and a determinist was challenged. Following the October Revolution in Russia and a host of failed revolutionary attempts in central Europe, what was now stressed was the centrality of revolution and the dialectic in Marx's thought. Most famous was the alternative reading put forward by Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* which was published in 1923. Lukács based his interpretation upon those of Marx's early writings

[3] Considering his decision to engage with Dühring in 1876, Engels wrote to Marx, 'my re-reading of early history and my studies in the field of natural science have rendered me yeoman service where Dühring is concerned': *MECW*, XLV, pp. 123–4.

[4] According to David Riazanov, '*Anti-Dühring* was epoch-making in the history of Marxism. It was from this book that the younger generation which began its activity during the second half of the 1870s learned what was scientific socialism, what were its philosophical premisses, what was its method . . . all the young Marxists who entered the public arena in the early eighties—Bernstein, Kautsky, Plekhanov—were brought up on this book': D. Riazanov, *Marx and Engels* (London, 1927), p. 210.

[5] I. Berlin, *Karl Marx* (1939), 4th edn (London, 1978), pp. 4, 14.

which were available at that time together with the section about the 'fetishism of commodities' in *Capital*.[6]

Lukács highlighted an unfamiliar Marx and anticipated some of the debate around 'the young Marx' when Marx's early writings were later published. But, as an overall reading of Marx, Lukács' interpretation was scarcely less partial than what it sought to displace. In particular, like much of the 'Western Marxist' approach which his book helped to inspire between the 1920s and the 1970s, Lukács' depiction of Marx's thought was distorted in two basic respects: first, by his desire to reconcile Marx's theory with the political fact that the first socialist revolution had occurred in Russia, a backward and still overwhelmingly agrarian economy; second, by his desire to situate Marx in the turn-of-the-century German *Methodenstreit* between advocates of positivist and neo-Kantian approaches to the 'human' sciences.

Both of these concerns figured prominently in *History and Class Consciousness*. In order to accommodate the new Soviet reality, Lukács downplayed and even devalued the central role played by 'the forces of production' in the original Marxian approach. In contrast to the machines, factories, and the industrial revolution which had played such a prominent role in *The Communist Manifesto* and in *Capital*, the association of progress with the advance of 'modern industry' all but disappeared. Capitalism was now associated with 'an enveloping net of metaphysical passivity'. Industry and science were now aligned not to 'praxis', but to 'contemplation' and it was now argued that there existed an elective affinity between 'capitalist society' and 'scientific method'. What defined Marxism, Lukács argued, was 'the viewpoint of the totality', which was also that of the proletariat as identical 'subject-object' of history.[7] In fact so allergic was Lukács to any alignment between Marx

[6] Marx's 1843 critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* was published in 1927. The *1844 Manuscripts* were published in 1932.

[7] G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. R. Livingstone (London, 1972), p. 19. Referring to German idealism, and in particular to Kant, Lukács argued that contemplative rationalism found itself trapped in the ever-fixed gulf between the phenomenal world of necessity and the noumenal world of freedom. To escape, it was necessary to conceive of a subject of thought capable of producing existence. In the *Science of Knowledge*, Fichte argued that the only way to overcome the gulf between the knowing subject and known object was to start from a notion of 'self-knowledge' or 'subject-object identity'. The only being for whom all knowledge could be self-knowledge would be a so-called 'absolute-ego', a God-like construct who created its objects in the act of knowing them. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx took up this idea. Man was not merely 'a natural being', a creature of his environment, as believed by Owenite socialists and the followers of Locke.

and the conventional markers of scientific progress that he maintained that orthodox Marxism could survive the systematic disproof of every one of its findings.[8]

Subsequent attempts to recast Marx's theory were even more wilful in their disregard for Marx's original aims. Most spectacular was the invention of a structuralist and anti-Hegelian Marx by Althusser in the 1960s.[9] Like Lukács, Althusser demoted 'the forces of production', which he dismissed as the remnant of the teleologies of German idealism. In their place, he substituted a Marx assembled from Spinoza, Lenin, and Lacan. Unsurprisingly, this largely fictive construction was a heroic failure, but it left one valuable legacy. In contrast to Lukács, Gramsci, and other historicist interpreters of Marx, Althusser emphasized that Marx's writings should be understood, not as the expression of a particular class or epoch, but rather as the attempt to construct a specific theory.

Since the 1970s, attempts to base an account of Marx on Engels' graveside portrait have been abandoned. Berlin's rancorous Mosaic patriarch in positivist garb was the last example. Counter-portraits—Lukács' revolutionary dialectician, Althusser's dour and unheralded pioneer of theoretical practice—also faded. Whatever their inherent interest, these interpretations succeeded only in turning Marx into an ever more remote and opaque figure. Supposedly dedicated to the rediscovery of Marx's real theory, these polemicists and theoreticians had strayed ever more peremptorily away from the historical sources which could have aided their quest.

Biographers in turn did little to correct these increasingly fanciful assumptions. Berlin had put forward a clear if mistaken idea of the theory which Marx spent his life attempting to elaborate. He argued that, by 1848, Marx's 'basic standpoint as a political economic thinker was fully formed' and that for the following twenty years and beyond Marx was engaged in writing up his book and 'gathering evidence for,

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'Man' was a '*human* natural being'. Like God, Man as human being created himself. History was 'a conscious self-transcending act of origin'. Marx was forced to give up this approach around 1845 after the attack by Stirner upon the still religious underpinnings of this kind of argument. See G. Stedman Jones, Introduction to *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: The Communist Manifesto* (London, 2002), pp. 130–1, 140–4; on Lukács' use of the idea of the identical subject-object, see G. Stedman Jones, 'The Marxism of the Early Lukács', *New Left Review* (ed.) *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader* (London, 1977), pp. 14–16.

[8] 'Orthodoxy refers exclusively to method': Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 1, 27, 132.

[9] See L. Althusser, *For Marx* (London, 1967); idem, *Reading Capital* (London, 1972).

and disseminating, the truths which he had discovered'.[10] By contrast, McLellan, writing in 1973, made little attempt to state what the theory was or explain the problems Marx encountered in attempting to elaborate it. What did *Capital* really add to what had been written in *The Communist Manifesto* about the dynamism of capitalism and the polarizing forces undermining it? Why did Marx find it necessary to introduce the cumbersome and as it turned out unworkable distinction between use value and exchange value in elaborating the theory? Finally—a question McLellan and other biographers have not asked—did Marx abandon *Capital*? And, if so, why? McLellan did not pose these questions because he assumed that the 'presuppositions and predictions' of the theory were 'not susceptible of ultimate refutation'.[11] Finally, in the post-Cold War era, even the presumption that Marx possessed any specific theoretical ambition seems to have faded away. According to Francis Wheen, Marx's most prominent current biographer, *Capital* was 'not really a scientific hypothesis', but 'a work of the imagination: a Victorian melodrama, or a vast Gothic novel'.[12]

But there has always existed one other well known starting point from which research on Marx's thought could proceed; a safer foundation, it seemed, because it started from the words of Marx himself. This is the famous paragraph in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* of 1859 in which Marx outlined his conception of history.[13] This text has often served as a summary of 'historical materialism' in Party schools and Communist Party textbooks. It also seems to have provided the starting point for the Communist Party Historians' Group and for the English Marxist historians writing between the 1950s and the 1980s.[14] The starting point of those historians belonging to what Edward Thompson called

[10] 'With prodigious thoroughness he had constructed a complete theory of society and its evolution.' His 'idea' was that of 'providing a complete account and explanation of the rise and imminent fall of the capitalist system'. He 'concentrated his entire being upon the attainment of this purpose, and towards the end of his life, achieved it': Berlin, *Karl Marx*, pp. 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14.

[11] D. McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (London, 1973), p. 352.

[12] F. Wheen, *Karl Marx* (London, 1999), p. 305.

[13] *MECW*, XXIX, pp. 263–4. The passage begins: 'in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces ... At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production ... then begins an epoch of social revolution' etc.

[14] Members of this group included Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Rodney Hilton, Raphael Samuel, and Victor Kiernan. Members of this group were responsible for the foundation of the most important historical journal of that period, *Past and Present*.

'a Marxist tradition' was the broad acceptance of 'the determination of consciousness by social existence'.[15]

Finally, it was also upon the basis of this passage that Gerry Cohen attempted to translate Marx's thought into a coherent and systematically connected set of propositions.[16] Unlike the preceding Western Marxist tradition, Cohen tried to remain faithful to Marx's original philosophical intentions. He therefore restored 'the forces of production' to their central place in 'the materialist conception of history'. But what Cohen intended—to turn Marx's conception into a currently viable and philosophically robust theory—was undercut by three important and unanticipated results of his impressive step-by-step construction of the theory.

First, it became clear that Marx had not been consistent in his use of terms. Supposedly foundational concepts like the 'forces of production' themselves were never clearly or unambiguously defined. Second, and more seriously, it seemed that even after the most skilful modifications performed by Cohen to make the component parts fit together without tautology or contradiction, the most crucial distinction underpinning the theory—that between the material and the social—could not be completely sustained.

But third, even if the terminological confusion between work relations ('the appropriation of nature') and relations of production (social relations of ownership) could be cleared up by recognizing that not all production relations belonged to the economic structure of society, there remained the larger difficulty of maintaining a consistent separation between the material and the social and of according a clear causal primacy to the former.[17] In order to sustain such a case, it was necessary to maintain that productive advance was independent of social form. But even if Cohen was certainly right to insist that Marx always argued that relations of production corresponded to, or came into contradiction with, the development of the forces of production, and therefore that the development of the productive forces was causally prior, in Marx's conception of the

[15] E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London, 1978), p. 200. Thompson refers to 'social being'. Marx in the 1859 Preface to *The Critique of Political Economy* refers to 'social existence': *MECW*, XXIX, p. 263. The difference means only that Thompson was using an older translation of Marx's 1859 text. On Thompson's sense of an Anglo-Marxist tradition, see his 'An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 123.

[16] G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford, 1978). Cohen understood this paragraph to constitute the core of what he called 'an old-fashioned historical materialism'. Eric Hobsbawm saluted it as 'superb . . . [it] presents historical materialism in its most pregnant form': E. J. Hobsbawm (ed.), *Karl Marx: Pre-capitalist Economic Formations* (London, 1964), p. 10.

[17] See Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, pp. 112–3.

development of capitalism the causality appeared to work the other way round. According to *The Communist Manifesto*, 'the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production and with them the whole relations of society'.[18] In Marx's account, the development of the forces of production is stimulated by the social forms of competition and capital accumulation. If social being determines consciousness, it is hard to see how the social relations of production could fail to shape the development of knowledge and the adoption of new productive techniques. The only other possibility was that the whole historical process—or what Marx called 'the natural history of mankind'—was guided by an inexplicit set of teleological assumptions.[19]

If therefore Marx's main aim had been to construct a theory of history in the strong sense, there was no way, so it seemed, in which this theory could be modernized or reformed. But was this the theory that Marx was trying to construct? An alternative interpretation might focus upon the more immediate problems of historical explanation and associate 'the materialist conception of history' more broadly with the notion of social determination. In this sense, it is clear that Marx belonged to Edward Thompson's 'Marxist tradition'. It was the 1859 Preface which had declared that 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence which determines their consciousness'.[20] But it is doubtful whether an economic determinist approach to history was as central to Marx's theorizing as twentieth-century Marxism was later to assert.

Determinism was not a continuous preoccupation for Marx. In fact, it is unlikely that we would have heard of 'historical materialism'—a term anyway not used by Marx—but for his need to defend his 1844–5 theory of the imminence of communism against the accusation of Max Stirner that Marxian communism with its appeal to Feuerbach's Man as species being was just one more extension of the Protestant God whose power had derived from 'the tearing apart of Man into natural impulse and con-

[18] Stedman Jones, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 222.
[19] The teleological underpinning was a residue of the Young Hegelian beginnings of Marx's theory, in which what had originally been imagined as an end crisis of Christianity was translated into an end crisis of capitalism. See Stedman Jones, *Communist Manifesto*, Introduction, *passim*. According to Meghnad Desai, Marx later came to realize that no systemic necessity dictated that capitalism should ever undergo a terminal crisis. See M. Desai, *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism* (London, 2002).
[20] *MECW*, XXIX, p. 263.

science'.[21] By juxtaposing not 'Man' to God , but the individual to 'Man', Stirner had exposed the quasi-religious basis of the Feuerbachian appeal and punctured the Young Hegelian invocation of world historical crisis in the transition from the Christian to the humanist world.

Marx could not escape association with a moralizing and quasi-religious form of humanism by rejecting the validity of humanist or socialist goals as such. His solution was therefore to divest *all* ideas of any autonomous role whatsoever. That solution could preserve the notion of crisis and the imminent arrival of communism, but only at the expense of removing the normative and voluntarist aspects of socialism as a movement which would 'change' the world.

But it was not long before Marx began to experience the inconveniences of this position. In his French writings of 1848–50, for all their rhetorical brilliance, Marx found real difficulty in applying a socially determinist approach to the explanation of republicanism or to the essentially *constitutional* character of the struggle between elected president and elected assembly. His basic assumption that with the development of 'the forces of production' the proletariat would grow and the bourgeoisie would have to adopt a more and more repressive state form to contain it, worked well as an interpretation of the Second Empire, but was ill-equipped to explain the transition from Second Empire to Third Republic, or indeed the rise of Gladstonian liberalism in Britain. Forced to abandon the simple evolutionary scenario relating type of state to degree of capitalist development in the decades after 1848, Marx found it difficult in later works like *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* of 1875 to explain why one developed capitalist state should differ from another.[22] As he himself admitted to Kugelmann in a letter of 1862, he had arrived at the basic principles at least from which even others could reconstruct his system 'with the exception perhaps of the relationship of different forms of state to the different economic structures of society'.[23]

In a larger sense, these were all problems which had been created by the dictates of mid-1840s polemic during the break-up of Young Hegelianism. Later on, Marx and Engels made attempts to qualify or moderate their position. Their position was explained by Engels in a letter to Bloch in 1890:

[21] Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. D. Leopold (Cambridge, 1995), p. 82.
[22] *MECW*, XXIV, pp. 94–5.
[23] Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 28 December 1862, *MECW*, XLI, p. 435.

> according to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is *in the final analysis* the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself . . . If some younger writers attribute more importance to the economic aspect than is its due, Marx and I are to some extent to blame. We had to stress this leading principle in the face of opponents who denied it, and we did not always have the time, space or opportunity to do justice to the other factors that interacted upon each other.[24]

Another way of illuminating this question is to re-examine the context in which Marx wrote the famous Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* of 1859.[25] It was written for a book to be published in Prussia in a form intended to deflect the attentions of the censor. Marx presented himself as a scholar who, since the closure of the *Rheinische Zeitung* (of which he had been editor) in 1843, had 'eagerly grasped the opportunity to withdraw from the public stage to my study'. Reference to the political significance of the book was coded. No mention was made to the relevance of political economy to Marx's idea of communism.

Marx's private correspondence at the time also provides firm evidence of the tactical considerations which had led him to write as he did. Explaining the character of the book to Joseph Weydemeyer, he wrote 'you will understand the political motives that led me to hold back the third chapter on "Capital" until I have again become established'; and to Engels, who complained that the book was 'VERY ABSTRACT', Marx replied, 'since the whole thing has an EXCEEDINGLY serious and scientific air, the canaille will later on be compelled to take my views on capital RATHER SERIOUSLY'.[26]

All this suggests that while the centrality of history in Marx's work is not to be doubted, it is a misleading half-truth to write as if the elaboration of a 'materialist view of history' were Marx's principal aim. Marx's prime ambition was not to construct a theory of history, but to discover man's path to communism. His interest in history was instrumental. History furnished the means by which that path would be uncovered.

A more revealing clue to Marx's aim can be found in the phrase: 'critique of political economy', the subtitle to *Capital* in 1867. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx had also declared 'the critique of political economy' to be his main purpose. He did so again in 1857 in what is often regarded as

[24] Engels to Joseph Bloch, 21–2 September 1890, *MECW*, XLIX, pp. 34, 36.

[25] Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History* is entirely devoted to providing an explanatory gloss of one long paragraph in Marx's Preface; see above, note 16.

[26] Engels to Marx, 9 April 1858; Marx to Engels, 13–15 January 1859; Marx to Joseph Weydemeyer, 1 February 1859, *MECW*, XL, pp. 304, 368, 376, 377.

the first draft of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*; and, as we have seen, the one part of that manuscript which he wrote up and published in 1859 was called *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. If there is a constant thread in what Marx declared to be his aim, it is contained in this phrase.

What did the phrase 'critique of political economy' mean? Here the recent work of intellectual historians on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is extremely valuable.[27] For it has demonstrated that Marx was by no means the first to attempt a critique of political economy—or more generally of 'commercial society' (of which political economy was the theory). Attempts to resist, control, mitigate, improve, or transcend 'commercial society'—or what would now be called capitalism—went back at least to the late seventeenth century.

Political economy itself grew out of a formalization of the investigations of Hume and Smith, who had in turn conducted their first enquiries within the framework of the natural law, inherited from Grotius and Pufendorf. A central concern of this 'modern' natural law was the origin and justification of private property. If, as the Bible taught and classical sources confirmed, God had originally given the earth to man in common, how had it come about that in the more developed parts of the world private property had become the norm? And why had a parallel development not occurred among the many 'savage' and 'barbarian' tribes encountered by early modern explorers? It was from these questions, most rigorously pursued within the natural law tradition, that there emerged the conjectural histories of mankind in which it was assumed that man had progressed through 'four stages of society' (hunting-gathering, pastoralism, agriculture, commerce). The development of mankind through these different stages was connected with increases in productivity associated with the growth of population, the diversification of needs, and the development of the division of labour.[28]

The first three of these stages were also connected with distinctively different forms of property. It should therefore be clear that Marx's

[27] See D. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975); I. Hont and M. Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983); J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge, 1985); A. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton, NJ, 1977); D. Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996); E. Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Smith, Condorcet and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); I. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); on the German reception of this debate, see L. Dickey, *Hegel, Religion, Economics and the Politics of Spirit 1770–1807* (Cambridge, 1987).

[28] See Stedman Jones, *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 162–77.

theory of history was by no means as original as many twentieth-century commentators have assumed. Marx's conception of history, which was based upon the changing relationship between 'forces of production' (level of technology) and relations of production (property relations), was a restatement of this natural law tradition.

Within the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debate about commercial society, two distinctive and contrasting positions help to explain the tensions and conflicts which shaped the history of radicalism and socialism. The first, *anti-capitalism*, encompassed the many attempts to curb the growth of capitalism and what were seen as its accompanying evils: growing inequality, effeminacy, the loss of martial spirit, the stupefying effects of the division of labour, and political corruption. Proposals included tariffs, sumptuary laws, division of landed property, redistributive taxation, resettlement of the workers on the land, new forms of education, and insistence upon simple manners and simple dress as part of the ambition to re-establish a polity based upon virtue.

By contrast, the emphasis of the second position was upon *post-capitalism*. It started from capitalism's achievements but looked beyond it towards a visionary future. This included celebration of capitalism's extension of the market, creation of new needs, the ever greater variety of consumer goods, and approval of the refinement of culture associated with the decline of patriarchal and feudal authority and the increasing freedom of workers and women. The free development of commercial society had opened the way to a new form of society. It had laid the foundations of a society of plenty. In the imminent post-capitalist society, not only would present miseries be overcome, but abundance and the harmony associated with it would result in a diminishing need for law and coercion, private property, and the state.

As this distinction makes clear, eighteenth-century discussion had bequeathed to the world two very different lines of criticism of commercial society which are too often conflated together. Out of the asceticism of the anti-capitalist tradition, so powerfully articulated by Rousseau, there emerged at the extremes of the French Revolution a form of revolutionary republicanism, which, in the case of Babeuf, concluded that virtue depended upon equality and equality was incompatible with private property. It was from this line of reasoning, generally an offshoot from revolutionary republicanism, that 'communism' emerged in France in the 1830s. By contrast, the post-capitalist position—pacific, unrepublican, unrevolutionary, and sceptical about or hostile towards equality—focused upon a world of plenty for all made possible by peace, machines, and the advent of a new faith or social science. This position came to

be known as 'utopian socialism' and was associated with the Saint-Simonians and the Fourierists in France and with the Owenites in Britain.

Marx's socialism started out emphatically from a *post*-capitalist position. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx condemned the egalitarian fantasies of a 'crude' levelling communism, 'which has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not even reached it'. His goal at that point was not merely 'the complete return of Man to himself', but 'a return ... embracing the entire wealth of previous development'.[29] That was also why in *The Communist Manifesto* he so insistently praised the material achievements of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. But what made his version of post-capitalist theory particularly powerful was that it was built upon, and presented as, an extension or critique of the reasoning found in natural law and political economy. From the natural law tradition Marx derived the notion of primitive communism: the idea that in the primeval condition of mankind, resources outstripped needs; that there was therefore no need for private property or mechanisms and institutions to allocate labour and divide its product. This situation had been characterized by Grotius as one of 'the negative community of goods'.[30] And so, what has usually been referred to as the Marxist theory of the state is really nothing of the kind. Natural law theory stated that primitive communism came to an end because population increased, new needs developed, and a situation of relative scarcity came into existence. Relative scarcity produced the need for institutions to ensure the allocation of labour and the division of the product. This was the origin of the state and the system of justice which went alongside it.

Where Marx was original was in the inference he drew from this familiar story. If the state was not a timeless necessity, but the product of relative scarcity, then the advent of a society of abundance could mean the removal of the need for private property, justice, and the state. Hence the centrality of the 'industrial revolution' to Marx's conception of communism. It would usher in abundance and a new version of the 'negative community of goods'. Just as the seemingly limitless productivity of machine production and the harnessing of steam-power suggested the imminence of the global possibility of abundance for all, so the increasing frequency of crises of *over*production suggested that at the threshold of

[29] Marx, 'The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844', *MECW*, III, p. 296.

[30] Grotius used this term to distinguish it from 'positive community of goods'—the forms of communal life and communal possession of property practised by the Essenians, early Christians, and a succession of utopian communities down to the Reformation and after.

abundance, capitalism had reached the limits of its usefulness. At the same time, growing evidence of the deepening discontent of workers and of their increasing political radicalization, especially in the most advanced industrial centres, suggested that a revolution of the producers might overthrow capitalism and that after a brief but necessary period of proletarian rule (the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'), the 'prehistory of mankind', as Marx called it in 1859, would come to an end.[31]

This had been Marx's view in 1848 at the time when he drafted *The Communist Manifesto*. From around this time, Berlin and others considered Marx's theory to be 'complete' or at the very most, simply in need of empirical material to buttress its case. But if this interpretation were true, it would make Marx's subsequent travails inexplicable. Marx's position may have been extreme in its speculative audacity. It undoubtedly contained visionary, even apocalyptic elements, carried over from the Young Hegelian millenarian excitement at what they took to be the imminent end of Christianity. But Marx was not a mere prophet or visionary. His theory took off from a set of inferences drawn from natural law and political economy and it was backed up by the impressive first-hand observations recorded in Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844.

That meant, however, that success or failure in Marx's case was not a matter of finishing a book, but of proving a set of propositions which he had assembled between 1845 and 1848. First, it would need to be shown that commercial society or the capitalist mode of production *was* just a particular historical stage in the development of the 'forces of production', that there were limits beyond which it could not further develop. Second, it was necessary to demonstrate that an economy without a market could match the dynamism and creativity of capitalism; that it could sustain and reproduce itself in an ever-expanding world of abundance.

These were the tasks which faced Marx in his years of London exile. Critics have concentrated upon the first point, and have long pointed to the fact that Marx was unable to demonstrate the presence of any unambiguous self-destruct mechanism within capitalism.[32] But arguments about a so-called 'breakdown theory' may have been based

[31] Marx, Preface to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', *MECW*, XXIX, p. 264.

[32] For instance, even if the *Manifesto*'s polarization between capitalists and proletarians were true, this did not prove that capitalism would come to an end. Similarly, *Capital*'s declining rate of profit looked equally unlikely to lead to a terminal crisis, once the counter-tendencies were taken into account. For a recent and thought-provoking analysis of these questions, see Desai, *Marx's Revenge*; still valuable is P. M. Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York, 1942).

upon a misunderstanding of Marx's intentions. It was enough that the growing dysfunctionality of capitalism should generate an 'era of social revolution'.

But it is also possible that the inability to depict a terminal crisis pointed to a more serious failing in the idea that capitalism or commercial society was just another 'epoch' in the economic development of society, akin to the 'ancient', 'feudal', or 'asiatic'. As Adam Smith had already discovered before Marx, when he scrutinized the Scottish four-stage theory of society, commerce was not really a 'stage' at all.[33] Exchange could be traced back to the beginning of history, and was constitutive of all forms of human society in the same way as speech and the division of labour. Furthermore, trade, like private property, was already present in the agricultural stage; the fourth stage, commerce, was therefore at most a quantitative extension of the third (agriculture). Marx's attempt to situate the 'capitalist mode of production' within a sequence of economic forms, each corresponding to a higher level of productivity, may have run into similar problems.[34]

Even more serious, however, was the difficulty posed by the theory of communism. Biographers and commentators have barely noticed that this was a problem. They seem to have imagined that Marx's refusal to draw up blueprints for utopian communities released him from any obligation to spell out how communism would operate. Yet, as a matter of fact, Marx in his writings of the 1850s did make some precise statements about his society of the future. In particular, he specified that there would be no mediation through the market. Wealth would satisfy need directly. The market would be replaced by a rational plan drawn up by the 'associated producers'. Marx rejected the market because it subjected man to chance; imbalances between supply and demand could be corrected only retrospectively or, if there was no *effective* demand, not at all. The market also paid no attention to the qualitative differences between individuals. In sum, it mocked human purposive action.[35]

[33] On Adam Smith and the four-stage theory, see I. Hont, 'The Language of Sociability and Commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the Theoretical Foundations of the Four Stages Theory', in A. Pagden (ed.), *Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1986).

[34] Marx did not employ the terminology of the 'four stages' (modes of subsistence and degrees of development of productivity) used by the Scots. He referred to the forms of property described by German classical historians, especially Niebuhr, and elaborated by them as legal–political entities. See Stedman Jones, *Communist Manifesto*, ch. 11.

[35] 'The true law of political economy is *chance*, from whose movement we, the scientific men, isolate certain factors arbitrarily in the form of laws': Marx, 'Comments on James Mill, *Elements d'économie politique*', *MECW*, III, p. 211.

In the 1850s, Marx's rejection of the market led him to investigate pre-capitalist societies.[36] Their common characteristic was that the harmonization of resources and needs was effected by forces other than the market: by customary norms, time-hallowed traditions, political or religious institutions. Furthermore, the institutions which regulated and organized production were also responsible for the organization of all other aspects of life. This meant that production was regulated to meet a traditional and pregiven set of needs.

This investigation of 'pre-capitalist economic formations' was a pioneering piece of historical research, an incontrovertible testament to Marx's greatness as a historian. Eric Hobsbawm is right to claim that it represents Marx 'at his most brilliant and profound'.[37] But politically it was a dead end. For it highlighted the enormous gulf which separated capitalism from all its predecessors. Capitalism was the first form to break free from a rigid and highly regulated framework, and this enabled economics to become separated from all other spheres of life. This also explained the enormous superiority of capitalism in forwarding production. Only capitalism—and its core, the market—had an inherent interest in the expansion and proliferation of *new* needs.

This was the point at which Marx ran up against a problem which proved to be insoluble. Marx's communism in the 1840s had started emphatically from the dynamism of a modern exchange economy. Only by moving on from its achievements was it possible to imagine the satisfaction of the needs of the all-round personality. But how was it possible to move on, once the dynamic core of this economy, the market, had been removed? In the 1850s, Marx also introduced the notion of 'use value' in order to highlight what was specific to the social relations of commercial society. But this only made matters worse. In the 1840s, what had distinguished men from animals was the capacity to create new needs. But the introduction of use value appeared to reintroduce a moralistic distinction between authentic and inauthentic need. Use value was the 'natural' relation of things to men. So the world of use value imposed a 'natural limit'. The division of labour and the methods of production in pre-capitalist formations were also described as 'natural' and references to ancient societies often became overlaid by a pathos previously not present.

Marx's labours have often been compared with those of Prometheus. But it may turn out that Casaubon is a more appropriate point of com-

[36] See Marx, 'Forms Preceding Capitalist Production', in 'Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58', *MECW*, XXVIII, pp. 399–439.
[37] Hobsbawm, *Karl Marx: Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, p. 10.

parison. Engels and the Marx family at the time, and nearly every biographer and commentator since then, have deferred to Marx's silences and taken his occasional pronouncements about his work at their face value. Provided only with glimpses of a theory supposedly in the course of construction, Engels and the Marx family did not probe deeply into the nature of the work Marx was doing during those long years at his desk. Nor since that time have biographers and commentators.

Harder questions need to be asked because, judged uncharitably, Volume I of *Capital* could be said to do little more than reiterate what had been said more sharply and more directly in *The Communist Manifesto*. The single volume of *Capital* published in Marx's lifetime might be impressive for all sorts of incidental reasons (Wheen's 'Gothic novel' and so on). But this was not why it was written. Even less was it supposed to be Marx's final word. Instead, it needs to be thought of as the vast prolegomenon to a treatise which never came.

If Volume I of *Capital*, together with the two further volumes posthumously assembled by Engels, are to be considered the intended result of Marx's long years of study, what then took Marx so long? Marx himself never gave a straightforward answer to this question. He seems to have set up a protective screen between himself and the world, never engaged in self-criticism, and never admitted failure, least of all, one imagines, to his closest confidantes—Engels and his wife. Therefore, the inner tensions or crises associated with his work can only be inferred.

But these tensions certainly existed. How else to explain the astonishing fact—again almost unremarked by his biographers—that some time in the early 1870s, at least a decade before his death, and without telling anyone, Marx abandoned *Capital* unfinished, and turned his attention to questions of prehistory and the future of the Russian commune?[38] Why should Marx have given up the project upon which he had been engaged for over twenty years?

The answer at this stage must be speculative. But I would argue that *Capital* was no more than the tip of an iceberg; the first instalment of a theory which Marx found himself unable to deliver. Marx abandoned the project because he had reached a dead end. He was not able to establish his notion of capitalism as a *finite* mode of production; and he was not able to present a convincing depiction of communism as a

[38] On Marx's interest in prehistory in the years after 1870, see G. Stedman Jones, 'Radicalism and the Extra-European World: The Case of Marx', in D. Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2007).

dynamic economy without a market. It was the failure to resolve these fundamental theoretical problems which explained why *Capital*—unambiguously conceived as a post-capitalist work—was abandoned and why in the 1870s Marx appears to have turned away from thought about Britain and western Europe and buried himself in Russian agrarian statistics.[39] What had started as the boldest of all post-capitalist theories had turned almost imperceptibly into the rebuilding of yet another pre-capitalist economic formation.

The process through which this happened was certainly not straightforward or clear-cut. Marx oscillated between silence or evasion on the one hand, and bursts of unrealistic optimism on the other. On more than one occasion, he talked as if the whole theory could be completed in six weeks. Furthermore, as late as his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in 1875, Marx was talking in *post-capitalist* terms about the stateless higher stage of communism.[40] He was, it seems, unable to face the consequences of admitting defeat, even if his changing position on Russia hinted at a fundamental shift of position.

This reading is also confirmed by Engels' reaction when he began reading Marx's manuscripts after his death. He was clearly very shaken to discover quite how unfinished *Capital* was. The posthumous publication of Volumes II and III of *Capital* in 1886 and 1894 was, therefore, not only a monument to Engels' intellectual heroism, but also more than an act of loyalty to his dead friend. For Engels' edition passed over the question why Marx had abandoned the book. Whether by accident or by design, he deflected attention away from more fundamental lacunae by focusing upon the so-called 'transformation problem' (the translation of value into price). By announcing that Marx had found a solution to this question—a solution which Bohm-Bawerk effectively dismantled a year after Engels' death in 1896—Engels provoked a debate in which the main defects of *Capital* came to be considered technical, an issue for specialized discussion among economists, rather than more general debate among socialists and political philosophers.

[39] After Marx's death, Engels found two whole cubic metres of Russian statistical material. Engels hated those piles of Russian books and told Lafargue he would have liked to burn them. See B. Nicolaievsky and O. Maenchen-Helfen, *Karl Marx: Man and Fighter* (London, 1976), p. 395. This change of perspective also helps to explain why—though only in the most strangled and oblique way—Marx backed the 'populists' against the 'Marxists' in their battle about the path towards socialism to be taken in Russia. See H. Wada, 'Marx and Revolutionary Russia', in T. Shanin (ed.), *The Late Marx and the Russian Road* (London, 1983).
[40] See Marx's distinction between the lower and 'higher phase of communist society': *MECW*, XXIV, pp. 86–7.

Engels' toil, therefore, helped to perpetuate a legend, long nurtured within the Marx household, of a great masterpiece all but completed when its author was cruelly struck down by ill-health and exhaustion. How otherwise could the Marx family—and for that matter Engels—have justified the miseries they had endured and the endless help and encouragement they had given Marx? Whatever the reason, Engels' editing obscured the fact not only that the manuscript was a long way from completion, but more fundamentally that it had failed in the original task it had set itself.

Marx's inability to admit failure and the continued collusion of his family and of Engels in the concealing or denying of this failure had public as well as private consequences. A myth had been created, the myth of an unfinished masterpiece, rather than a theory abandoned because it was impossible to establish. The confusing consequence of this denial was that Marxism still proclaimed itself to be a *post-capitalist* theory, but for the most part depended upon an *anti-capitalist* stance.[41] There was no *post-capitalist* theory of communism.

In the years before 1914 this was not so important. As Werner Blumenberg put it, for a few generations of workers, it was enough to be certain that socialism would be achieved 'with the inevitability of a natural process and that the hour would come when the expropriators would be expropriated'.[42] For this was what was proclaimed in *Capital*, or what Engels called the 'Workers' Bible'. But after 1917 and, even more, after the anti-colonial revolutions during the thirty years following the Second World War, Marx's inability to depict a progressive post-capitalist economy in theory was matched by the inability of established communist regimes to promote a spontaneous and non-authoritarian form of economic growth in practice.[43] In this way, Marx's inability to admit defeat and the unwillingness of his immediate circle to confront what had happened was not simply a personal or family tragedy, but was also to be of consequence in the larger history of the world.

[41] It is also true that Marx from the beginning had always incorporated elements of an anti-capitalist position in his theory of the advent of socialism. This was already clear in the mid-1840s in his espousal of the idea of class struggle and revolution in *The German Ideology*, and it was even more evident in 1849–51 in his adoption of the notoriously 'neo-Roman' and republican notion of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. But these conceptions had always been assigned as means associated with the revolutionary process of transition.

[42] W. Blumenberg, *Karl Marx: An Illustrated Biography* (London, 1972), p. 165. This short work is one of the best available studies. It was written by the archivist of the Marx–Engels and German Social Democratic Manuscripts at the Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.

[43] Not to mention a society which incorporated democratic decision-making and cultural diversification.

7.
The Drama of Revolution and Reaction: Marxist History and the Twentieth Century

ALEX CALLINICOS

> The present is a problem of history, a problem that refuses to be ignored and one which imperiously demands such mediation. It must be attempted.
>
> Georg Lukács[1]

There is something slightly paradoxical about the fact that the text of Marx that has probably been most admired by historians, Marxist and otherwise, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), was written, not as history, but in order to make sense of the present—that is, as a piece of contemporary political analysis. Developing and correcting the account Marx had given closer to the actual events of the course of the 1848 Revolution in France in *The Class Struggles in France* (1850), *The Eighteenth Brumaire* seeks to explain the political turmoil of 1848–9 that ended with Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*. Both texts display Marx's skills in narrative and invective; both grapple with the problem, inherent in his research programme, of the relationship between social classes and the political field. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* greatly complicates the picture, with its exploration of Bonaparte's success in exploiting the stalemate between bourgeoisie and proletariat and the peasantry's memory of his uncle, Napoleon I, to gain control of an increasingly bureaucratically ramified state apparatus. As Gwyn Williams puts it, 'gone is the direct connection between a class and its political representatives, everything in the political arena is now mediation'.[2]

As Williams also observes, together 'the texts constitute a Drama of Revolution which, in the exposure of the contradictions of a bourgeois regime grounded in universal suffrage, becomes a Theatre of the

[1] G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London, 1971), p. 158.
[2] G. A. Williams, '*18 Brumaire*: Karl Marx and Defeat', in B. Matthews (ed.), *Marx: 100 Years On* (London, 1983), p. 33.

Absurd'—though one that leaves us reflecting on the defeat of the Revolution.[3] This same intellectual engagement with the present, interpreting it as a drama of revolution and reaction, can be seen at work in Marxist writing on the twentieth century, which has produced works as distinguished as any by Marxist historians dealing with earlier periods. In this chapter I consider, first, cases where Marxists have dealt with specific cases of the dynamics of revolution, but also with the processes through which revolution is prevented and reaction institutionalized, before, in the second part, addressing large-scale Marxist interpretations of the whole sweep of twentieth-century history.

The Eighteenth Brumaire can be said to be the first instance of a genre of Marxist historical writing that takes as its object some of the most important political episodes of the century—writing that seeks to make sense of some contemporary event by constructing a narrative of it informed by the Marxist theory of history. The most distinguished example of this genre, Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, is on an altogether greater scale than *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, and the drama it unfolds has—from its author's perspective—a happy ending, indeed, for a revolutionary, *the* happy ending, a political triumph in which he himself had a leading role. Yet, like Marx and *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Trotsky wrote the *History* in exile, and with the political aim of vindicating the revolution—not, in his case (at least as he saw it), against triumphant counter-revolution, but against the setback represented by the political victory of Stalin and his allies. Like Marx too he constructs a political narrative driven by the interplay between participants in a political field spectacularly disorganized by the overthrow of the old regime, and social classes constituted, or striving to constitute themselves, as collective actors. Indeed, unifying the narrative is the gradual formation of the Russian working class as a revolutionary subject, a process whose logic is outlined by Trotsky at the beginning of the *History*:

> The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old regime. Only the guiding layers of a class have a political programme, and even this still requires the test of events, and the approval of the masses. The fundamental political process of the revolution thus consists in the gradual comprehension by a class of the problems arising from the social crisis—the

[3] Ibid., p. 12. Marx famously concludes *The Eighteenth Brumaire* by insisting the defeat is temporary and predicting that, 'when the imperial mantle finally falls on the shoulders of Louis Bonaparte, the bronze statue of Napoleon will crash from the top of the Vendôme Column': *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (London, 1975–2005), XI, p. 197. It should in all fairness be pointed out that, whatever trouble Marx had with predictions, this was one he got right.

> active orientation of the masses by a method of successive approximations. The different stages of a revolutionary process, certified by a change of parties in which the more extreme always supersede the less, express the growing pressure to the left of the masses—as long as the swing of the movement does not run into objective obstacles.[4]

Revolution thus has an objective logic that, rooted in the structural contradictions of the mode of production, involves a kind of discovery process in which subaltern classes, breaking into the political arena from which they are normally excluded, test and discard the solutions offered by different parties until they arrive at one that accurately represents their interests and allows them to take power for themselves. A few sentences later Trotsky seeks to situate 'the role of parties and leaders' in this dialectic of social class and political representation: 'They constitute not an independent, but nevertheless a very important, element in the process. Without a guiding organization the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam.' But the significance of the piston and the box is underlined by Trotsky's stress on the indispensable part played by Lenin in orienting the Bolshevik Party towards a second revolution after the fall of Tsarism and bullying its leaders into actually organizing the insurrection of October 1917.[5]

This important qualification invites the reflection that what may defeat the social logic of progressive radicalization at work in revolutions are not simply 'objective obstacles' but the absence of the right kind of political organization and leadership. Indeed, one of the main burdens of Trotsky's political writings first in eclipse and then in exile during the 1920s and 1930s (the strict equivalents of *The Class Struggles in France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire*) was to trace in country after country—China, Germany, Spain, France—how this logic was indeed defeated. His lucid, angry running commentary on the failure of the German Social-Democratic and Communist Parties to unite in the face of the rise of National Socialism have a particular quality both for their accurate prediction of the disastrous consequences of this failure and for their recognition of fascism as a distinctive political phenomenon.[6] The example offered both by these political writings and by the *History* inspired some of the ablest of his followers to write contemporary histories of other twentieth-century revolutions that sought to trace the interplay of class

[4] L. D. Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 3 vols (London, 1967), I, p. 16.
[5] Ibid., I, pp. 16–17; see, on Lenin's role, ibid., I, ch. 16, and III, ch. 5.
[6] L. D. Trotsky, *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (New York, 1971).

interests and political forces that in each case led to defeat—Harold Isaacs on the Chinese Revolution of 1925–7, Pierre Broué on the German Revolution and on the Spanish Civil War, Adolfo Gilly on the Mexican Revolution.[7]

The original Spanish title of Gilly's book, *La revolución interrumpida*, conveys well the sense of a process that had, at least temporarily, skidded off course, as do these words of William Morris, which Isaacs made the epigraph of his book: 'Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes about turns out to be not what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.' But for Trotsky and those influenced by him, the twentieth-century episode that most resonated with the irony of unintended consequences was the subsequent course taken by the one revolution that had in their eyes definitely succeeded—the emergence after October 1917 of the Stalin regime and the transformation it wrought in the Soviet Union. Trotsky offered his most considered thoughts on this subject in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), and also sought to explore the role of his principal opponent in a biography of Stalin on which he was working when he was murdered in August 1940. The use of the biographic mode to probe the historical evolution of revolutionary Russia was taken up and pursued with great distinction by the dissident Trotskyist Isaac Deutscher, first in a study of Stalin (1949) and then in his outstanding trilogy on Trotsky himself (1954, 1959, 1963).[8]

Deutscher's own interpretation of Russian history tended towards the more 'objectivist' pole of the model of revolutionary process developed by Trotsky. Thus, without concealing his crimes, he portrays Stalin as, often in spite of himself, the agent of a socio-political transformation whose eventual outcome will realize the ideals of more principled Bolsheviks. This quasi-Hegelian view of history as a long-term process driven by forces of which human beings are the unwitting vehicles is the mirror-image of a voluntarist tendency evident in Trotsky and still more marked in some of his followers. Thus Trotsky wrote on the eve of the Second World War: 'The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the

[7] H. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, 2nd rev. edn (Stanford, CA, 1961); P. Broué and E. Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (London, 1972); P. Broué, *The German Revolution 1917–23* (Leiden, 2004); A. Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution* (London, 1983). Isaacs' book was originally published in 1938, when he was a Trotskyist, and subsequently modified to take into account his later change of views: see his 'Preface to the First Revised Edition' (1951).

[8] I. Deutscher, *Stalin* (Harmondsworth, 1970), *The Prophet Armed* (Oxford, 1970), *The Prophet Unarmed* (Oxford, 1970), and *The Prophet Outcast* (Oxford, 1970).

crisis of revolutionary leadership.'[9] In other words, all the objective conditions exist for the kind of progressive radicalization that triumphed in October 1917. The main 'obstacles' to this process repeating itself are, negatively, the absence of anything corresponding to the Bolshevik Party and, positively, the dominance of the left by non-revolutionary forces such as the Social Democrats and pro-Stalin Communists. The reason why this way of putting it like this is voluntarist is that it leaves out of account the deeper processes—economic, political, cultural—that underlie and sustain this (from Trotsky's perspective) unfavourable constellation of forces. But the experience of the twentieth century encouraged another kind of Marxist intellectual engagement with contemporary history, one that is concerned, not with the logic of revolution, but with the conditions of its non-occurrence and the political forms taken by the efforts to prevent it—in other words, with the processes that Trotsky and his followers tended to ignore.

The model for this second kind of Marxist writing on the twentieth century is provided by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*. Confronted, like Marx after 1848, with defeat—in the much starker form of Mussolini's fascism, which condemned him to prison for the rest of his life—Gramsci sought to probe the roots of this radical historical setback. This led him into, on the one hand, a long-term exploration of the Italian past, which discovered in the Renaissance and the Risorgimento the sources of the historic logjam that had prompted the Italian bourgeoisie to forge a compromise with (and not, as in France, to seek to destroy) the landowners and the Church. Gramsci, on the other hand, developed a set of concepts—notably those of hegemony and civil society—facilitating the analysis of the institutional and ideological modes through which a dominant class secures consent to its rule and through which a subaltern class could subvert and displace it. Though this project encouraged Gramsci to explore the Italian *longue durée*, its point was to master the present intellectually—and the future politically. Some of the most suggestive passages in the *Notebooks* are devoted to 'Americanism' and 'Fordism', concepts he uses in order to explore the modalities of social domination in advanced industrial capitalism.

Nearly a generation after his death in 1937, Gramsci's enterprise inspired the editors of *New Left Review* to investigate the historical sources of contemporary English stasis. In a celebrated essay, 'Origins of the

[9] 'The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International', in W. Reisner (ed.), *Documents of the Fourth International: The Formative Years (1933–40)* (New York, 1973), p. 181.

Present Crisis' (1964), Perry Anderson inaugurated a remorseless analysis of the weaknesses of the British left and labour movement by outlining 'a "totalizing" history of modern British history' that located the sources of 'the most powerful, most durable and most continuous' capitalist hegemony 'in the world' in 'the cumulative constellation' of four 'fundamental moments'. These were, in order, the English Revolution of the 1640s and 1650s, 'the first, most mediated, and least pure bourgeois revolution of any major European country', which institutionalized the hegemony of a capitalist aristocracy over the bourgeoisie proper; the Industrial Revolution, also the first, from which the British working class emerged in the unfavourable climate of the wars with revolutionary France and their aftermath and before the emergence of modern socialism; the role of the Empire in perpetuating aristocratic domination; and Britain's insulation from the wars that ravaged continental Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. The result was a ruling class locked into economic patterns formed when the City ruled the Victorian world economy and therefore ill-fitted to address the competition from newer industrial powers, and a working class that had failed to develop its own autonomous ideology and hence was trapped in a defensive 'corporate class-consciousness'. Thus 'a supine bourgeoisie produced a subordinate proletariat'.[10]

This bracing diagnosis provoked immense controversy on the Marxist left in Britain, most notably in the shape of a lengthy polemical broadside by the great historian E. P. Thompson.[11] Undeterred, Anderson defended his theses, extended them to demonstrate how the absence of a genuinely hegemonic bourgeois ideology had blocked the development of sociology and Marxism in Britain, and subsequently restated them in terms that sought to avoid what he came to concede was the valid charge made by some of his critics of an excessive reliance on cultural factors in his earlier essays.[12] As Thompson noted, an implicit assumption of Anderson's

[10] P. Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review*, XXIII (1964), pp. 26–53; quotations from pp. 27, 28, 41, 43. The original version of Anderson's interpretation of English history was developed in tandem with Tom Nairn, whose main contributions to the subject are collected in *The Break-up of Britain* (London, 1977), but see also *The Enchanted Glass* (London, 1988).

[11] E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', in J. Saville and R. Miliband (eds), *The Socialist Register 1965* (London, 1965), fuller version in E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978).

[12] P. Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo-empiricism', *New Left Review*, XXXV (1966), pp. 2–42; 'Components of the National Culture', ibid., L (1968), pp. 3–57; 'The Figures of Descent', ibid., CLXI (1987), pp. 20–77. The last of these essays provoked further responses, including M. Barratt Brown, 'Away with All the Great Arches', ibid., CLXVII (1988), pp. 22–51; A. Callinicos, 'Exception or Symptom? The British Crisis and the World System', ibid., CLXIX

argument was the treatment of the French Revolution as providing the model of bourgeois revolutions: if England's was 'the least pure bourgeois revolution of any major European country', then the Jacobins set the norm of purity.[13] In this respect Anderson was perfectly faithful to Gramsci, for whom the Jacobins' success in constructing a 'national-popular bloc' uniting urban and rural poor to sweep away the old regime contrasted negatively with Italy's 'passive revolution', which united the country at the price of preserving much of the past. But this seemed like an increasingly problematic assumption. For one thing, the idea that the French, let alone the English, Revolutions were led by and chiefly benefited anything resembling a bourgeoisie was increasingly contested by mainstream historians; for another, Marxist scholars led the way in challenging the thesis, first developed by Max Weber but later a staple of post-war liberal historiography, that the disasters suffered and inflicted by Germany in the first half of the twentieth century could be explained by the country's *Sonderweg* (special path), its deviation from the norms of liberal capitalist development set by Britain, France, and the USA. Maybe the history of capitalist development traced a cluster of diverse national trajectories, each involving different relations between the state, the economy, and the main social classes, none of which could claim privileged status as the model for others.[14]

The idea of a normal path of historical development was in any case an obstacle to a third group of Marxist historians, those seeking to confront not so much the absence of revolution but its antithesis—regimes that did not even pay lip service to the ideals of universal emancipation articulated by the great revolutions, but sought instead to institutionalize hierarchies of racial domination. The most important case was, of course, the experience of National Socialism in Germany. Here Tim Mason in a series of pioneering studies, many of them originally published in German, sought to demonstrate that even a regime that sought systematically to abolish class struggle by uniting authentic Germans in the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community), and excluding, repressing, and

(1988), pp. 97–106; and C. Barker and D. Nicolls (eds), *The Development of British Capitalist Society: A Marxist Debate* (Manchester, 1988). Anderson responded in 'The Light of Europe', the conclusion to a collection of essays, *English Questions* (London, 1992), which includes all of Anderson's articles on English history (in some cases a little bowdlerized), with the exception of 'Socialism and Pseudo-empiricism'.

[13] Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 47.

[14] See A. Callinicos, 'Bourgeois Revolutions and Historical Materialism', *International Socialism*, 2, XLIII (1989), pp. 113–71, and, for an influential critique of the *Sonderweg* thesis, D. Blackbourn and G. Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History* (Oxford, 1984).

ultimately exterminating outsiders continued to be shaped and constrained by the conflict between labour and capital. This enterprise led Mason to seek to uncover the subterranean forms of workers' resistance in Nazi Germany and to trace the ways in which fear of a repeat of the Revolution of November 1918 informed the regime's social policy; it also extended, more controversially, to the thesis that Hitler's decision to go to war in the autumn of 1939 was significantly influenced by the inability of the German political economy to continue to grow and therefore to contain social contradictions, without access to external resources that could be most easily obtained through military conquest.[15]

A parallel attempt to demonstrate that the logic of capital accumulation and class struggle governed regimes apparently ruled by very different priorities was undertaken by a school of South African Marxist historians and sociologists in the 1970s and 1980s. They were known as the 'revisionists' because they challenged the dominant liberal academic interpretation of twentieth-century South African history, which treated the development of forms of racial segregation, consolidated as the apartheid system after the election of the National Party in 1948, as irrational obstacles imposed by Afrikaner nationalists to the development of a modern market economy. In pioneering essays Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe argued that segregation emerged primarily in the period of British colonial domination in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to provide cheap migrant labour for export-oriented mining and agrarian capitalism; apartheid proper represented the generalization of this system to meet the needs of the secondary industries serving the home market that became an increasingly important feature of the South African economy from the inter-war period onwards.[16] Different versions of this thesis inspired a generation of scholars to explore the complex relationships between capitalist economic relations, structures of racial domination, and forms of resistance, as well as to promote the development of a black working-class movement capable of confronting both apartheid and capitalism. In the event, the actual outcome of the crisis of the National Party regime—the successful detachment of capitalism from

[15] T. W. Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1993) and *Nazism, Fascism, and the Working Class* (Cambridge, 1995). On the origins of the Second World War, see Richard Overy's critique of Mason, 'Germany, "Domestic Crisis", and War in 1939', *Past and Present*, CXVI (1987), pp. 138–68, and the exchanges between David Kaiser, Mason, and Overy in ibid., CXXII (1989).

[16] M. Legassick, 'South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence', *Economy and Society*, III (1974), pp. 253–91, and H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour-power in South Africa', ibid., I (1972), pp. 425–56.

apartheid and the former's survival in a liberal-democratic state presided over by the African National Congress—indicated that the functional fit between economic relations and segregationist institutions was less tight than the revisionists had originally suggested. But the richness of the research programme they had developed was demonstrated by one of the masterpieces of history from below, Charles van Onselen's study of a black sharecropper's lifelong effort, in defiance of the increasingly confining structures of both capitalism and apartheid, to continue working the land.[17]

* * *

I now turn to consider how Marxists, notably Perry Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, have sought since 1989 to make sense of the twentieth century as a whole, in the teeth of the dominant liberal interpretations, articulated most famously by Francis Fukuyama. For South Africa's relatively peaceful transition to a non-racial democracy was, of course, not the only surprise that the end of the century proved to have in store. The sudden and comprehensive collapse of the Soviet Union and its client regimes in central and eastern Europe was an authentically world-historic event, bringing the Cold War and with it the partition of Germany and Europe to an end, but also permitting the integration of the international system within the framework of liberal capitalism and under the leadership of the USA. One intellectual consequence was to reinstate the idea of a 'normal' path of historical development with a vengeance. The achievement of liberal democracy by South Africa, central and eastern Europe, and (much more dubiously) Russia and its near abroad, was widely interpreted as the closure of the interlude constituted by the 'short twentieth century' (1914–91) and as history's resumption of the path on which it had been set before it was blown off course by the First World War.[18] This was more than simply an interpretive schema, but had policy implications: states deemed to have deviated from liberal capitalist norms of 'good governance' were liable to be certified 'failed' or 'rogue' states and subjected

[17] C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine* (New York, 1996). Wolpe wrote the most nuanced appreciation of the complex and changing relationship between apartheid and capitalism: *Race, Class, and the Apartheid State* (London, 1986). See also the retrospective interview with Legassick, 'The Past and Present of Marxist Historiography in South Africa', *Radical History Review*, LXXXII (2002), pp. 111–30, which contains a good presentation and bibliography of revisionism.

[18] The popular historical writing of Niall Ferguson is in this respect representative: see especially *Empire* (London, 2003) and *Colossus* (London, 2004).

to sanctions of different kinds, including, when geopolitically convenient, invasion.[19]

This systemic transformation invited the kind of large-scale historical analysis in which Marxists have specialized. But first off the blocks was an ambitious philosophy of history originating in a very different quarter, Francis Fukuyama's celebrated thesis that the collapse of the Eastern bloc marked the End of History. Fukuyama drew on an exotic mixture of neo-conservatism, the ideology, increasingly influential in the administrations of Bush *père et fils*, which portrayed American-style liberal capitalism in perpetual but ultimately triumphant struggle with a succession of ideological rivals, and Alexandre Kojève's quasi-existentialist version of a Hegelian philosophy of history, which provided a mode of entry for much gloomier visions of modernity.[20] According to Fukuyama, history is a progressive evolutionary process driven by two mechanisms, the ideological struggle for recognition and the search, facilitated by modern natural sciences and prompted by individual desires, for higher output through technological innovation. The collapse of historical Communism marked its failure to compete effectively in either process; its elimination removed the last modern rival to liberal capitalism, and thereby brought history to an end: productivity-enhancing innovations would no doubt continue, thanks to the unlimited nature of both human desire and technical progress, but there would be no more systemic struggles.[21]

Fukuyama had, in a sense, beaten the Marxists at their own game. He later endorsed Ken Jowitt's ascription to him of 'a "Marxist" social teleology', even if the outcome of the historical process had proved, he claimed, to be capitalism rather than Communism.[22] Marxists influenced by Deutscher's interpretation of the Cold War as a global version of the class conflict between capital and labour, 'a struggle between opposed social systems', responded remarkably sympathetically to Fukuyama: like him, they believed that capitalism had won the 'Great Contest', unlike him they regretted this outcome.[23] Perry Anderson, for example, in a long interpretive essay that, with characteristic erudition, traced the

[19] For two very different philosophical takes on this policy discourse, see J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA, 1999) and J. Derrida, *Voyous* (Paris, 2003).

[20] See L. Niethammer, *Posthistoire* (London, 1992); A. Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives* (Cambridge, 1995), ch. 1; and, for Fukuyama's later, more jaundiced view of his own ideological milieu, *After Neoconservatism* (London, 2006) (US edn, *America at the Crossroads*).

[21] F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992).

[22] Fukuyama, *After Neoconservatism*, p. 55.

[23] I. Deutscher, *The Great Contest* (New York, 1961), quotation from p. 89.

intellectual itinerary of the idea of the End of History, argued that no critique of Fukuyama from the left could be effective unless it were able to demonstrate the feasibility of a revived anti-capitalist project, an undertaking that he estimated to be, while not completely hopeless, certainly lacking in much to go on in the post-Cold War juncture.[24] In a later piece Anderson greeted the new millennium with a reaffirmation and extension of this perspective, documenting the global dominance of the USA and its version of capitalism, the ideological entrenchment of neo-liberalism, the capitulation of social democracy to these forces, and the intellectual marginalization of Marxism. In these circumstances, the intellectual left needed to reject the easy option of seeking 'silver linings in what would otherwise seem an overwhelmingly hostile environment' and instead to practise 'an uncompromising realism', 'refusing any accommodation with the ruling system and rejecting every piety and euphemism that would understate its power'.[25] Consistent with this orientation, Anderson and *New Left Review* greeted the immense wave of opposition to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 with deep scepticism, arguing that most of those who baulked at this war were compromised by their support for earlier imperial ventures such as the 1999 war over Kosovo and predicting that most of the governments that had refused to participate in the attack on Iraq would soon make their peace with Washington.[26]

But it was another Marxist historian, fully sharing Anderson's sense of a world-historic defeat, who made the most ambitious attempt to capture the meaning of the twentieth century. Eric Hobsbawm was the only one of the group of outstanding Marxist historians that emerged in Britain after the Second World War who did not resign from the Communist Party as a result of the 1956–7 crisis induced by Krushchev's secret speech and the Hungarian Revolution; he had also proved himself a master of imaginative and compelling macro-history in his trilogy on the long nineteenth century (1789–1914)—*The Age of Revolution* (1962), *The Age of Capital* (1975), and *The Age of Empire* (1987). *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (1994) was in one sense a sequel to this great work but, as Hobsbawm acknowledged when he described the book as

[24] P. Anderson, 'The Ends of History', in idem, *A Zone of Engagement* (London, 1992). See also F. Halliday, 'An Encounter with Fukuyama', *New Left Review*, CXCIII (1992), pp. 89–95, and G. Elliott, 'The Cards of Confusion', *Radical Philosophy*, LXIV (1993), pp. 3–12. Anderson has now written an interesting appreciation of Fukuyama's second thoughts in *After Neoconservatism*: 'Inside Man', *The Nation*, XXVI, April 2006.

[25] P. Anderson, 'Renewals', *New Left Review*, 2, I (2000), pp. 5–24, quotation from p. 12.

[26] For example, P. Anderson, 'Force and Consent', *New Left Review*, 2, XVII (2002), pp. 5–30, and 'Casuistries of Peace and War', *London Review of Books*, 6 March 2003.

'an autobiographical endeavour', it was written much closer to its subject than was the trilogy.[27]

This proximity to Hobsbawm's own personal experience and political investments is expressed in the construction of the book's argument. He has reported that he initially conceived *Age of Extremes* as 'a sort of diptych'—in the first half of the century 'an age of catastrophe, in which every aspect of liberal capitalist society collapsed', followed in the second half by 'an era when, in one way or another, liberal capitalist society reformed and restored itself to flourish as never before'. But the fall of the Soviet Union, followed as it was by a deep economic depression in Russia and central and eastern Europe and by signs that 'the Western world economy itself was in the worst trouble it had known since the 1930s', led Hobsbawm to revise this scheme: 'the history of the Short Twentieth Century now looked much more like a triptych, or a sandwich: a comparatively brief Golden Age separating two periods of major crisis'.[28] Accordingly, *Age of Extremes* is organized into 'The Age of Catastrophe'—the wars, revolutions, and atrocities of 1914–45; 'the unprecedented and possibly anomalous Golden Age of 1947–73', defined by the post-war economic boom and the social transformations (urbanization, the advance of women, the rise of youth culture, etc.) that accompanied it; and 'The Landslide' that followed, 'a world which lost its bearings and slid into instability and crisis', a transformation announced by the economic recessions of the 1970s and 1980s but whose scale became clear only when 'real socialism' disintegrated at the end of the latter decade. Hobsbawm concluded with a panorama of problems confronting the world—demographic growth, ecological destruction, the incapacity of the neo-liberal policies inaugurated by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher to manage the world economy, the loss, with the eclipse of the USSR, of a powerful external pressure on Western capitalism to reform itself, the withdrawal of the mass of citizens of liberal democracies from engagement in public life—and with a warning: 'If humanity is to have a recognizable future, it cannot be by prolonging the past or the present. If we try to build the third millennium on that basis, we shall fail. And the price of failure, that is to say, the alternative to a changed society, is darkness.'[29]

Hobsbawm's take on the twentieth century had thus a considerable critical charge, as is brought out in a piece, published the same year as *Age of Extremes*, devoted to the growth of 'barbarization'. He understands this as a long-term process embracing both the breakdown of traditional social

[27] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes* (London, 1994), p. 4.
[28] E. J. Hobsbawm, *On History* (London, 1997), pp. 235, 236. Compare *Age of Extremes*, p. 6.
[29] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, pp. 8, 403, 585.

controls and the reversal of Enlightenment universalism, which was initiated by the 'Age of Catastrophe', continued under the Cold War (which Hobsbawm sees as a 'war of religion', reinstating the cruelty and dehumanizing of opponents characteristic of its early modern predecessors), and survived that global confrontation. The end of the Cold War 'left behind a sub-stratum of public barbarity' and precipitated 'the explosive collapse of political and social order on the periphery of our world system', notably in the Balkans and the Russian near abroad.[30] As is indicated by one of the main examples Hobsbawm gives of moral decline, the return of torture as a legitimate tool of state power, this critique has lost none of its actuality since it first appeared. In a larger sense, *Age of Extremes* can be seen as a riposte to Fukuyama, one that acknowledges the scale of the defeat suffered by the left—'if Marx would live on as a major thinker', Hobsbawm observed, '... none of the versions of Marxism formulated as doctrines of political action and aspiration for socialist movements were likely to do in their original form'—but that nevertheless insists that the effect would not be to strengthen liberal capitalism, but rather to add to the catalogue of crises that the existing system was incapable of addressing.[31] Though undoubtedly sincerely held, this nevertheless can be seen as serving a consolatory function for a historian whose allegiance to Communism was formed, as he describes in the most vivid and attractive portion of his autobiography, *Interesting Times*, during his adolescence in Berlin in the early 1930s, although the consolation has a wry quality: Communism may have failed, but this failure has left its historical opponent struggling even deeper in the mire.[32] In a sympathetic but critical appreciation of *Age of Extremes* in tandem with *Interesting Times*, Anderson points to the lop-sided structure of the former book:

> One particular chapter ... [,] 'Against the Common Enemy', substantially longer than the account of Fascism itself, is devoted to the anti-Fascist alliances of 1935–45: the Popular Fronts before the War, the Resistances after 1941, and above all the military pact between the USSR, UK and USA that eventually defeated the Wehrmacht. Here, Hobsbawm argues, the lines were drawn not between capitalism and Communism but between the descendants of the Enlightenment and its opponents.[33]

[30] E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Barbarism: A User's Guide', *New Left Review*, CCVI (1994), pp. 44–54, p. 53 (republished in *On History*).
[31] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 563.
[32] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times* (London, 2002), chs 4 and 5.
[33] P. Anderson, 'Confronting Defeat', *London Review of Books*, 17 October 2002, reprinted in P. Anderson, *Spectrum* (London, 2005), p. 312. Compare: 'Ideologically, it [anti-fascism] was based on the shared values and aspirations of the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution', Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 176.

Anderson puts this down to the influence of Enlightenment rationalism on Hobsbawm. Undoubtedly there is much to this: surveying the spread of barbarism, Hobsbawm 'declare[s] an interest. I believe that one of the few things that stand between us and an accelerated descent into darkness is the set of values inherited from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.' Indeed, his account of the process of barbarization has a different temporality from that of *Age of Extremes*, since the erosion of Enlightenment norms continues uninterrupted during the 'Golden Age' of 1945–73: he points to 'both a depressing and a curious phenomenon: the advance of barbarism in the West after World War II'.[34] But more directly political considerations are also at work here; the era of the Popular Fronts and the wartime Resistance marked the high tide of influence of the Communist Parties, as well as the period during which Hobsbawm came to maturity. He has written that, though 'emotionally, as one converted as a teenager in the Berlin in 1932, I belonged to the generation tied by an almost umbilical cord to hope of world revolution, and of its original home, the October Revolution, however sceptical or critical of the USSR,' '[p]olitically, having actually joined a Communist Party in 1936, I belong to the era of anti-fascist politics and the Popular Front. It continues to determine my strategic thinking in politics to this day.'[35] The political method practised by the CPs in this latter period—broad alliances uniting the labour movement and the progressive wing of the propertied classes around limited objectives—is one that Hobsbawm championed as recently as his interventions in the 1980s debates about the future of the Labour Party in the face of Thatcherism (an episode that, as Anderson rightly complains, helped to open the path followed by Tony Blair).[36] It is therefore not surprising that Hobsbawm should make the political experiences that dominated his youth and demonstrated (in his view) the efficacy of Popular Front politics the pivot of his book.

Anderson argues that the foregrounding of anti-fascist unity and the concluding image of darkness have alike a distorting effect: 'the underlying message of both is a way of turning defeat. The dream of the Popular Front in retrospect is that there was no victory of one party over another, since in reality we were all on the same side. The claim of the Landslide is that there was no victory, since in reality the other side lost too.'

[34] Hobsbawm, 'Barbarism: A User's Guide', pp. 45, 49.
[35] Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 218.
[36] P. Anderson, 'The Age of EJH', *London Review of Books*, 3 October 2002, reprinted in *Spectrum*, pp. 289–90. Hobsbawm's most important political writings of the 1970s and 1980s are collected in *Politics for a Rational Left* (London, 1989).

Anderson rejects both these 'strategies of consolation'. He charges Hobsbawm with underestimating the scale of economic growth, especially in East Asia, in the last decades of the twentieth century, and overestimating the scale of mass killing once the Cold War had passed its murderous peak during the 1950s and 1960s. Not only is liberal capitalism after the Cold War much more economically robust than Hobsbawm suggests, but, 'if neo-liberalism is still the hegemonic ideology of the time, the hegemonic power—in quite a new sense—is the United States'. For Anderson, 'the salient feature of the present is not the world at large is out of control, but that it has never been subject to such an extent of control by one power, acting to diffuse and enforce one system, as we see today'.[37]

The affinities and divergences between Hobsbawm and Anderson, particularly about how the twentieth century came to a close, are a matter of great interest in their own right. But they also invite reflection on three larger issues that at once are critical for any large-scale Marxist reading of the twentieth century and also must be addressed by any assessment of whatever patterns emerged at its conclusion. These issues are Stalinism, capitalism, and catastrophe. Anderson and Hobsbawm both accepted the Soviet Union's self-description as a different social system from Western capitalism and indeed, insofar as it was based on state ownership of the means of production and a planned economy, a superior one, even if Anderson, under the influence of Trotsky and Deutscher, placed a greater emphasis on the distortions and deformations introduced into the original Bolshevik project by Stalinism.[38] It followed from this view that the eclipse of the USSR marked a significant extension of capitalist power (even if, as we have seen, Hobsbawm tended to stress the downside of this reversal). But other Marxist interpretations of the Soviet Union were available, and had been almost since October 1917—that the Bolshevik regime had been capitalist or state capitalist from the start, that it became so at the end of the 1920s or even (for some Maoists) as late as the 1950s, or that Stalinism represented a new mode of production, neither capitalist nor socialist, but what the American Trotskyist Max Shachtman called 'bureaucratic collectivism'. Common to all these views was the refusal to draw the conclusion from the USSR's official ideology or even from its statization of the economy that it was socialist, and also the belief that

[37] P. Anderson, 'Confronting Defeat', *Spectrum*, pp. 316, 318.
[38] P. Anderson, 'Trotsky's Interpretation of Stalinism', *New Left Review*, CXXXIX (1983), pp. 49–58.

Stalinism represented a form of class exploitation in principle no better than that (Marxists believe) existed in the West.[39]

Anyone accepting one of these theoretical perspectives was likely to see Stalinism, not its fall, as the historical disaster. In other words, from this standpoint the great setback suffered by the socialist project in the twentieth century happened when it became identified with the Soviet regime; the collapse of that regime might then be seen as neither the End of History nor the descent of humankind into darkness, but as a moment of liberation, not just from the peoples subject to it, but for anti-capitalist politics, which could finally hope to shake off the incubus of Stalinism. Easier said than done, for at least three reasons. First, critical Marxist interpretations of Stalinism developed largely outside both the academy and the mainstream of the labour movement, usually amid the small-group controversies that have tended to reign among Trotsky's political progeny. This wasn't always, to put it mildly, the most favourable environment for rigorous historical enquiry. One major intellectual challenge would be to come up with an account of the entire course of Soviet history—from the Revolution to the fall—consistent with the new evidence provided by the (highly selective) opening of the old regime's archives. Second, and more specifically, such an account would have to provide compelling reasons against drawing the conclusion—which became part of the *doxa* in both East and West after 1989–91—that the kind of barbarities inflicted on the peoples of the Soviet Union in the Stalin era were the inevitable consequence of any attempt to abolish capitalism. Finally, even if the USSR had not been capitalism's antagonist in the way that Deutscher, Anderson, and Hobsbawm thought, one result of its fall seemed undeniably to strengthen liberal capitalism and its ideological legitimations. The important question was how long-term an effect this might be, but addressing that couldn't be separated from the second of the issues distinguished above—capitalism.[40]

[39] For a selection of Trotskyist perspectives on the USSR, see L. D. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (New York, 1972) and *In Defence of Marxism* (New York, 1973); T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia* (London, 1988); and E. E. Haberkern and A. Lipow (eds), *Neither Capitalism nor Socialism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1996). Historical background and theoretical assessment can be found in, for example, A. Callinicos, *Trotskyism* (Milton Keynes, 1990) and P. Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1994).

[40] For some immediate responses from the Western left to the collapse of the Soviet Union, see R. Blackburn (ed.), *After the Fall* (London, 1991); A. Callinicos, *The Revenge of History* (Cambridge, 1991); and R. Aronson, *After Marxism* (New York, 1994). Moshe Lewin has attempted to address the *longue durée* of the Soviet Union drawing on the archives in *The Soviet Century* (London, 2005).

The disagreement between Anderson and Hobsbawm about the condition of global capitalism at the turn of the millennium mirrored a larger dispute among Marxist political economists. Some argue that capitalism weathered a serious economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, but is now entering a new phase of development, though they differ over whether neo-liberal policies of privatization, deregulation, etc. actually impede or promote economic growth.[41] Others contend that global capitalism has still to emerge from the 'long downturn' which it entered in the late 1960s. The most influential contemporary exponent of this view is Robert Brenner who, not content with having revived the debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism back in the 1970s, has now stirred up Marxist economists with a very detailed, if theoretically heterodox, attempt to demonstrate that the advanced capitalist economies remain mired in a long-term crisis of profitability.[42] Brenner argues that the USA, Japan, and Germany all suffer from chronic over-capacity caused by competition between established and new producers. Critics (among them Anderson) have objected that the rise of China as a major industrial producer might offer a way out if its exports complemented rather than competed with those of the OECD.[43] David Harvey has pointed to an alternative possibility:

> increasingly fierce international competition as multiple dynamic centres of capital accumulation compete on the world stage in the face of strong currents of overaccumulation. Since they cannot all succeed in the long run, either the weakest succumb and fall into serious crises of localized devaluations or [into] geopolitical struggles between regions. The latter can get converted via the territorial logic of power into confrontations between states in the forms of trade wars and currency wars, with the ever-present danger of military confrontations (of the sort that gave us two world wars between capitalist powers in the twentieth century).[44]

Harvey conjures up this cheerful scenario in a book that is intended to develop his distinguished attempt to give Marxist political economy a spatial dimension by building into it a theory of imperialism. He con-

[41] For samples of these positions, see, respectively, G. Duménil and D. Lévy, *Capitalism Resurgent* (Cambridge, MA, 2004) and L. Panitch and S. Gindin, 'Superintending Global Capital', *New Left Review*, 2, XXXV (2005), pp. 101–23.

[42] R. Brenner, 'The Economics of Global Turbulence', *New Left Review*, CCXXIX (1998), pp. 1–265, and *The Boom and the Bubble* (London, 2002). Brenner's original article was the subject of an exhaustive symposium in *Historical Materialism*, IV and V (1999).

[43] For Anderson's version of this objection, see 'Civil War, Global Distemper: Robert Brenner', in *Spectrum*, pp. 263–5.

[44] D. Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford, 2003), p. 124.

ceives capitalist imperialism as 'a dialectical relation between territorial and capitalistic logics of power', an approach that allows him to integrate geopolitical competition between states into a broader theory of capital accumulation without treating the former reductively as a mere expression of economic interests.[45] Harvey owes the distinction between the two logics of power to Giovanni Arrighi, the author of an ambitious attempt at a long-term history of capitalism that centres on the shift from one capitalist hegemony to another. In *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994), Arrighi argues, under the inspiration of Fernand Braudel, that the capitalist world system has undergone long phases of development that he calls 'systemic cycles of accumulation'. Each cycle involves the global hegemony of a state that is able plausibly to claim that its pre-eminence serves not simply its own interests, but those of all the other states in the system. Though successive systemic cycles involve both the geographical expansion and the more intensive development of capitalism, each has the same structure—an upward phase when productive investment predominates, and a downward one in which financial speculation tends to take priority. The cycles overlap with one another, as the downward phase of one marks the beginning of the ascendancy of a new power. So far there have been four systemic cycles (of shrinking length, thanks to 'the speed-up in the pace of capitalist history')—the 'long fifteenth–sixteenth century', from the early 1340s to around 1630, when a consortium of Genoa and Spain was hegemonic; the 'long seventeenth century', from circa 1560 to the 1780s, the era of Dutch supremacy; 'the long nineteenth century' of British hegemony, from around 1740 to the 1930s; and the 'long twentieth century' that has, of course, belonged to the USA, 'which began during the Great Depression of 1873–96 and the concomitant financial expansion of the British regime of capital accumulation'.[46]

In such a brief summary, Arrighi's theory is easy to caricature—particularly the way in which he stretches the historian's shorthand of 'long centuries' to breaking point. But he avoids the more schematic tendencies of cyclical theories of this kind, devoting much illuminating detail, for example, to the differences between the British and American hegemonies. And his theory does have the merit of situating the twentieth century in the *longue durée* of capitalist development, so that its travails become the symptoms of an unsuccessful German challenge to British hegemony, of the latter's peaceful supersession by the USA, and of

[45] Ibid., p. 183. For a very similar conception of imperialism, see A. Callinicos, *The New Mandarins of American Power* (Cambridge, 2003), ch. 5.
[46] G. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (London, 1994), pp. 216, 214.

the beginnings of the latter's decline. Arrighi distinguishes between the 'the "*signal* crisis" of the dominant regime of accumulation', 'the beginning of every financial expansion, and therefore of every long century', and 'the "*terminal* crisis" . . . of the dominant regime of accumulation', which 'mark[s] the end of the long century that encompasses the rise, full expansion, and demise of that regime'. When originally outlining his theory in the early 1990s, Arrighi argued that the signal crisis of the USA developed around 1970, but its terminal crisis 'has not yet occurred'. He cited the competitive impact of Japan on the USA in the 1970s and 1980s as evidence that 'the displacement of an "old" region (North America) by a "new" region (East Asia) as the most dynamic centre of the process of capital accumulation on a world scale is already a reality'.[47]

The subsequent slide of the Japanese economy into a protracted depression led Arrighi to reassign the vanguard role in displacing the USA to China. He criticizes Brenner for failing properly to integrate geopolitics and finance into his analysis of the 'long downturn', arguing that the growing 'financialization' of the global economy represents a characteristic strategy of declining hegemons: the USA, like Britain before it, faced with the challenge to its political supremacy constituted by the Vietnam War and with increasingly strong manufacturing competition, has retreated to the 'final refuge' of the money markets and used its financial power, expressed for example in the dollar's role as reserve currency, to shore up its hegemony.[48] But this has brought only temporary relief, as the Iraq War has made clear. Arrighi argues that 'the chances are that, while its difficulties in Vietnam precipitated the "signal crisis" of US hegemony, in retrospect US difficulties in Iraq will be seen as having precipitated its terminal crisis'.[49] Far from reinforcing US hegemony, the Bush administration's imperial adventure has underlined its limits. Not only has American firepower been insufficient to pacify Iraq, but the opposition to the invasion and occupation has dramatized the extent to which Washington's global leadership is no longer seen as of general benefit to all the states in the system, while the ballooning US trade deficit announces the shift of economic power across the Pacific to China and India.

Here then is a very powerful riposte to Fukuyama, one that seeks to document the extent to which the fall of the Soviet Union foretold, not the

[47] Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, pp. 215, 216, 332.
[48] G. Arrighi, 'The Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence', *New Left Review*, 2, XX (2003), pp. 5–71, quotation from p. 50.
[49] G. Arrighi, 'Hegemony Unravelling—I', *New Left Review*, 2, XXXII (2005), pp. 23–80, p. 57; see also 'Hegemony Unravelling—II', ibid., XXXIII (2005), pp. 83–116.

New American Century dreamt of by the neoconservatives, but the beginning of the end of US hegemony. Arrighi's analysis contains much that is disputable and that has indeed been disputed.[50] Nevertheless, his work, along with that of Brenner and Harvey in particular, has set an important intellectual agenda around a series of themes—global competition and profitability, shifts in the distribution of economic power, the role of finance, imperialism, and geopolitical conflict—that can fruitfully direct Marxist research into the trajectory of capitalism as a world system. One major stimulus to these debates has been provided by the changed global conjuncture produced by the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. The direction taken by the writing I have been discussing has been to set that day, and especially the Bush administration's reaction to it, in the larger context provided by the historical evolution of the global political economy. But 9/11 also invites reflection on the third theme I sought to disentangle from Marxist attempts to make sense of the twentieth century—catastrophe.

For that century was, especially during its first half, what Hobsbawm calls an 'Age of Catastrophe', marked by the technical ingenuity employed to achieve mass killing on an unprecedented scale. The Holocaust, though of course bearing its own irreducible specificity as the attempt to exterminate European Jewry, has come to act as the symbol of this aspect of the twentieth century. Marxist historians have sometimes shied away from this subject. Hobsbawm pays astonishingly little attention to the Holocaust in *Age of Extremes*. More remarkably, Tim Mason confessed it paralysed his historical imagination:

> I have always remained emotionally, and thus intellectually, paralysed in front of what the Nazis did and what their victims suffered. The enormity of these actions and these sufferings both imperatively demanded description and analysis, and at the same time totally defied them. I could neither face the facts of genocide, nor walk away from them and study a less demanding subject. I find it almost impossible to read the sources, or the studies and testimonies which have been written on the subject. I know that many other historians of Nazism have had a similar experience.[51]

This can't be explained as the refusal to confront politically unpalatable facts: as we have seen, dissident Marxists have devoted much attention to the potentially more embarrassing phenomenon of Stalinism, and indeed were among the first to publicize the Soviet regime's atrocities.

[50] See, for example, Panitch and Gindin, 'Superintending Global Capital'.
[51] Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich*, p. 282, from his posthumously published Epilogue to a book that first appeared in German in 1977.

Hesitancy in addressing the Holocaust probably reflects the common enough feeling that it just is the hardest of all atrocities to make sense of, as well as an understandable enough revulsion at its unbearable reality; maybe it is also symptomatic of the Enlightenment rationalism that Anderson detects in Hobsbawm. Some Marxists have nevertheless written about the Holocaust.[52] For those who do, it raises the issue of how to conceive history in a way that goes beyond any simple tale of progress. In a celebrated text written in the first months of the Second World War, Walter Benjamin portrayed the historical 'chain of events' as 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage' and challenged the traditional association of historical materialism with progress: 'Nothing has corrupted the German working class so much as the notion that it was moving with the current.' Rather than rely on the notion of history unfolding in 'homogeneous, empty time', the Marxist historian should be on the lookout for the sudden shocks that interrupt the normal course of events and represent moments of revolutionary opportunity.[53]

There has been much debate about how to integrate Benjamin's critique of teleology into the Marxist theory of history.[54] But that this theory should be able to encompass catastrophe seems essential, and not just in order to be able to make some sort of sense of the outbursts of intentional mass killing that punctuated the twentieth century and, as 9/11 and the US reaction to it bear witness, have continued into the new millennium. Avoidable death need not take the form of conscious murder: it can be the consequence of the anonymous operation of social and economic mechanisms that result in large-scale death, either on a routine basis or in conjunction with other processes or events. The 18 million premature deaths every year from poverty-related causes illustrate the first case; Mike Davis offered an example of the second when he showed how the integration of the liberal world economy in the late nineteenth century interacted with the El Niño weather cycle to produce famine and mass death in India, China, and Brazil.[55] The relationship between economic rhythms and climactic patterns is likely to loom even larger in the twenty-first century.

[52] For example, N. Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference* (London, 1998); E. Traverso, *Understanding the Nazi Genocide* (London, 1999) and *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York, 2003); and A. Callinicos, 'Plumbing the Depths: Marxism and the Holocaust', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, XIV (2001), pp. 385–414. All these authors offer reflections on Marxism's relationship to the Holocaust as well as substantive interpretation of the latter.

[53] W. Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations* (London, 1970), pp. 259, 260, 266.

[54] See now Michael Löwy's close commentary, *Fire Alarm* (London, 2005).

[55] M. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (London, 2001).

There is little risk that history as catastrophe will cease to demand the attention of Marxists—and indeed everyone else.

All in all, then, Marxist writers have been able to address the perplexities of twentieth-century history with distinction. They have constructed powerful narratives of revolutions and their disappointment. They have refined their concepts and introduced new ones in order, in particular, to understand the processes and institutions through which revolution is prevented and its opposite installed in power. And they have provided compelling interpretations of the entire course of twentieth-century history, and in particular of the relationship between liberal capitalism and 'real socialism'. Like any human achievement, this body of writing is full of flaws, limitations, and silences. But some of the questions it leaves open set, as I have tried to show, an agenda for efforts to make sense of the world that liberal capitalism inherited after 1989. Marxist historiography thus continues to display one of its most distinctive features: it doesn't merely seek to interpret the past, but, as Georg Lukács put it, also confronts 'the present as a historical problem'.[56]

[56] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 157 (italics removed).

8.
Marxist Historiography Today

ERIC HOBSBAWM

There are really two parallel developments of Marxist historiography, corresponding, as it were, to the two halves of the famous Feuerbach thesis (the philosophers so far have only interpreted the world: the point is to change it). Most intellectuals who became Marxists from the 1880s on, including Marxist historians, did so because they wanted to change the world in association with the labour and socialist movements which, largely under Marxist inspiration, became mass political forces. Incidentally, this association led world-changing historians naturally towards certain fields of study—notably the history of the common or labouring people—which, while naturally attractive to people on the Left, originally had no specific connexion with a Marxist interpretation. Conversely, when such intellectuals ceased to be social revolutionaries, they were also likely, from the 1890s on, to stop being Marxists. The October Revolution revived this incentive, although we should remember that Marxism was not formally abandoned until the 1950s or later in the major social-democratic parties on the continent. It also, in due course, produced what might be called obligatory Marxist historiography in the USSR and subsequent states under communist governments. The era of anti-fascism reinforced it. From the 1950s on this motivation weakened in the developed countries, though not in the Third World, although the huge expansion of university education and student unrest produced a substantial new academic contingent of world-changers in the 1960s. However, a substantial proportion of these were radical but no longer clearly or at all Marxist. Probably this reached a peak in the 1970s, shortly before—again primarily for political reasons—a massive reaction against Marxism began, which still continues. Its main effect has been to destroy the belief that the success of a particular way of organizing human societies can be predicted and assisted by historical analysis, although this is still believed by liberals. History—certainly Marxist history—has been severed from teleology, though not from an interest in the future.

Given the uncertain prospects of social-democratic and social-revolutionary movements, I think it is unlikely that there will again be a politically motivated rush to Marxism, but here we must avoid excessive Occidentalocentrism. If I am to judge by the demand for my own history books, I note that it expanded in South Korea and Taiwan from the 1980s, in Turkey in the 1990s, and that there are signs today that it is expanding in the Arabic-language world.

Curiously enough, an interesting revival in Marx's fortunes has occurred in the West since the late 1990s, but its origins are surprising. It was a number of intelligent business writers and capitalists (including some with an interest in changing society) who recognized the extraordinary prescience of *The Communist Manifesto*, predicting, as it plainly did, the nature of the late-twentieth-century globalization of capitalism. The world of 1998 had been anticipated in 1848. A good example is *Karl Marx ou l'esprit du monde* (2005),[1] a highly successful biography-cum-interpretation of Marx written along these lines by the French socialist politician and banker Jacques Attali. So far this revival seems to have had no historiographic repercussions.

Meanwhile, what of 'interpreting the world'? Here the story is somewhat different but also parallel. It is about the rise of what may be called the anti-Rankean reaction in history, of which Marxism was an important, but not always fully acknowledged, element. Essentially this was a double movement. On the one hand, it challenged the positivist belief that the objective structure of reality was, as it were, self-explanatory: all that was needed was to apply the methodology of science to it, explain why things happened the way they did, and discover 'wie es eigentlich gewesen'. For all historians, historiography remained and remains anchored to an objective reality, namely the reality of what happened in the past, but it starts not with facts but with problems, and includes the enquiry about how and why such problems and paradigms and concepts are formulated in different social/cultural environments and historic traditions.

On the other hand, it was a movement to bring history closer to the social sciences, and therefore to turn it into part of a generalizing discipline capable of explaining the transformations of human society in the course of its past. History was to be about what Lawrence Stone called 'asking the big Why questions'. Some of these were plainly suggested by Marx, the writers usually providing alternative answers to his. Almost

[1] J. Attali, *Karl Marx ou l'esprit du monde* (Paris, 2005).

certainly they were also stimulated by the rapid rise of Marxist-inspired socialist working-class parties.

The initiative in this 'social turn' came not from within historiography, but from the social sciences (sociology, social anthropology, political sociology, economics with a historical interest), some of them in the process of being created as such in the period 1880–1910. Some were themselves being set up as evolutionary, i.e. historical disciplines.

Insofar as Marx may be seen as the father of the sociology of knowledge, Marxism certainly contributed to the first of these movements, though it has been quite mistakenly attacked for an alleged blind objectivism. On the other hand, the most familiar impact of Marxist ideas, the stress on economic and social factors, was not specifically Marxist, though greatly assisted by the impact of Marxian analysis. All this was part of a general historiographical movement, observable from the 1890s on, which was eventually to reach its peak in the 1950s and 1960s, to the benefit of my own generation of historians, which had the good luck to become the transformers of the discipline. The socio-economic current was wider than Marxism. Occasionally the initiative in founding the journals and institutions of economic/social history came from actively social-democratic scholars like Carl Grünberg and Ludo Moritz Hartmann, as in the one that became the *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1893), but this was not the case in Britain, France, and the USA, and even in Germany the strongly historical school of economics was far from Marxian. Only in the Third World of the nineteenth century—Russia and the Balkans—as in the Third World of the twentieth, was economic history, like all 'social science', primarily social-revolutionary in orientation and therefore likely to be strongly attracted to Marx. In any case, the historical interests of most Marxist historians were, to use the terminology of the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, not so much in the 'base' but in the relations of 'base' and 'superstructure'.

The number of specifically Marxian historians was always relatively small at any moment. The major impact of Marx on history was through historians and social scientists who took up Marx's questions, whether or not they gave alternative answers to them. And, in turn, Marxist historiography has moved a good way ahead of what it was in the days of Kautsky and Plekhanov, largely owing to fertilization by other disciplines (notably social anthropology) and by Marx-influenced and Marx-supplementing thinkers like Max Weber.

I stress the generality of this historiographical current, not because I want to underestimate the differences within it, or within its components like Marxism. The historical modernizers asked the same questions and

saw themselves as engaged in the same intellectual battles, whether they derived their inspiration from human geography, Durkheimian sociology and statistics as in France (both the *Annales* and Labrousse), or from Weberian sociology like the 'Historische Sozialwissenschaft' in Federal Germany, or Marxism like the CP historians who became crucial carriers of historical modernization in Britain, or at least founded its main journal. And they saw each other as allies against historiographical conservatism, even when they represented mutually hostile political or ideological positions, like M. M. (Sir Michael) Postan, the Cambridge economic historian who attracted the British Marxist students of the 1930s. The classical expression of this coalition of progress is the journal *Past and Present*, founded in 1952, which became influential within the historical world. It succeeded because the young Marxists who founded it deliberately refused ideological exclusiveness, and the young modernizers of other ideological stamps were prepared to join with them and, what is more, knew that ideological and even political differences did not stand in the way of collaboration.

This front of progress advanced dramatically from the end of the Second World War to the years of Lawrence Stone's 'broad cluster of changes in the nature of historical discourse' in the 1970s, which there is not space to discuss here. Since that time the modernizing coalition has been on the defensive—including even the non-Marxist components such as economic and social history.

By the 1970s the mainstream of history had been so transformed, not least by the influence of the Marxist way of asking the 'Big Questions'—that I could find myself writing 'it is today often impossible to tell whether a work has been written by a Marxist or a non-Marxist unless the author advertises his or her ideological position . . . I would like to look forward to a time when no one asks whether authors are Marxist or not.'[2] But, as I also observed, we were far from such a utopia. On the contrary: the need to insist on what Marxism can bring to historiography has become greater since then. It is now greater than it has been for a long time, both because history needs to be defended against those who deny its capacity to help us understand the world, and because new developments in the sciences have transformed the historiographical agenda.

Methodologically, the major negative development has been the construction of a set of barriers between what happened or happens in history and our capacity to observe and understand it—by denying that there is any reality that is objectively there and not constructed by the observer for

[2] E. Hobsbawm, *On History* (London, 1998), p. 224.

different and changing purposes, or by arguing that we can never penetrate beyond the limitations of language, i.e. of the concepts which are the only way in which we can talk about the world, the past included. Though not necessarily relativist, the so-called 'history of representations', increasingly popular since the 1970s, though it has produced interesting work, also lends itself to finessing the problem of what happened and why. Relativism in itself eliminates the question whether there are patterns and regularities in the past about which historians can make meaningful statements. This is also denied on less theoretical grounds, usually by arguing that the course of the past is too contingent, i.e. that generalizations are excluded because pretty well anything could happen or might have happened. Implicitly these are arguments against any science. I won't bother about the more trivial attempts to return to the past, such as the attempt to return its course to high political or military decision-makers, or to the omnipotence of ideas or 'values', or to reduce historical scholarship to the important but by itself insufficient search for empathy with the past.

The major immediate political danger to historiography today is 'anti-universalism' or 'my truth is as valid as yours, whatever the evidence'. This naturally appeals to various forms of identity-group history, for which the central issue of history is not what happened, but how it concerns the members of a particular group. There has been a marked rise in the importance of such history since 1968, some of it now well represented in the academy. There has also been an even more striking rise in one subset of this class, nationalist history, due chiefly to the emergence or re-emergence of large numbers of ethno-linguistically defined new 'nation-states', particularly since 1989.

In general terms, what is important to this kind of history is not rational explanation but 'meaning', not what happened but what members of a collective group defining itself against outsiders—religious, ethnic, national, by gender, lifestyle, or in some other way—feel about it. That is the appeal of relativism to identity-group history. For various reasons the past thirty years have been a golden age for the mass invention of emotionally skewed historical untruths and myths. Some of them—I am thinking of countries like India in the days of the Hinduist government, the USA, and Berlusconi's Italy, not to mention many of the new nationalisms with or without fundamentalist religious reinforcement—are a public danger.

However, while this also produces endless claptrap and trivia on the further fringes of nationalist, feminist, gay, black, and other in-group histories, not to mention the creation of new, largely mythical, 'national' histories, it has also stimulated some extremely interesting new historical developments in cultural studies, e.g. the new 'memory boom in contem-

porary historical studies' as Jay Winter calls it,[3] of which Pierre Nora's collective work *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (7 volumes, 1984–92) is a good example. Nevertheless, it must be said that, taken by itself, the memory boom is history at one remove, not 'What happened and why?', but 'What do those who came after make of it?' This is also the case, in some respects, of the widely popular 'history of representations'. On the other hand, even Marxists will have fewer reservations about the historical study of concepts and the nature of public discourse, which has produced such classic works as the encyclopedia of Brunner, Conze and Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (8 volumes, 1972–97), unless the authors in this field are tempted into the relativism of 'discourse theory'.

In my view it is time to re-establish the coalition of those who want to believe in history as a rational enquiry into the course of human transformations, against those systematically distorting history for political purposes, but also, more generally, against relativists and postmodernists who deny this possibility. Since some of these consider themselves on the Left this may split historians in politically unexpected ways. I think the Marxist approach is a necessary component of this reconstruction of the front of reason, as it was in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, the Marxist contribution is probably more relevant today, since the other components of the path-breaking coalition of the 1950s and 1960s, e.g. the post-Braudelian *Annales* and those inspired by structural-functional social anthropology, have rather abdicated.

Meanwhile, while postmodernists have denied the possibility of historical understanding and historians have barely noticed, developments in the natural sciences have put an evolutionary history of humanity firmly back on the agenda. They have done so in two ways. First, because the new DNA-analysis has established a firmer chronology of development since the emergence of *homo sapiens* as a species, and especially for the chronology of the spread of this species from its original African origin throughout the rest of the world and subsequent developments before the appearance of written sources. This has both established the astonishing brevity of human history—by geological and palaeontological standards—and has also eliminated the reductionist solution of neo-Darwinian socio-biology. The changes in human life, collective and individual, in the course of the past 10,000 years, let alone in the past ten generations, are too great for a wholly Darwinian mechanism of evolution via genes. They amount to the accelerating inheritance of acquired

[3] J. Winter, 'The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies', *Raritan*, XXI, 1 (2001), pp. 52–66.

characteristics by cultural and not genetic mechanisms—I suppose it is Lamarck's revenge on Darwin via human history—and it doesn't really help to dress this up in biological metaphors—'memes' and not 'genes'. Cultural and biological inheritance don't work the same way, even if we assume that both are subject to selection for survival. In short, the DNA revolution calls for a specific, historical, method of studying the evolution of the human species. Incidentally, it also provides us with a coherent framework for a world history, i.e. for taking the globe in all its complexity and not any particular environment or sub-area within it, as the unit of historical studies. History is the continuance of the biological evolution of *homo sapiens*, but by other means.

Second, the new evolutionary biology eliminates the hard-and-fast distinction between history and the natural sciences, already much weakened by the systematic historization of these in the past decades. Cavalli-Sforza, one of the multidisciplinary pioneers of the DNA revolution, speaks of 'the intellectual pleasure of finding so many similarities between disparate fields of study, some of which belong traditionally to the two opposite sides of culture: science and the humanities'.[4] In short, it liberates us from the bogus debates on whether history is or is not a science.

Third, it inevitably returns us to the basic approach to human evolution adopted by archaeologists and prehistorians, which is to study the modes of interaction between our species and its environment and its growing control over it, i.e. to ask essentially Marx's questions. 'Modes of production' or whatever we want to call them, based on major innovations in productive technology, in communications, and in social organization—but also in military power—have been central to human evolution. These innovations, as Marx was aware, did not and do not make themselves. Material and cultural forces and relations of production are not separable. They were and are the activities of men and women in situations not of their making, acting and taking decisions ('making their history'), but not in a vacuum, not even a vacuum of imputed rational calculation.

Hence the new perspectives on history should also return us to that essential, if never quite realizable objective of those who study the past, 'total history'—that is to say not a 'history of everything' but history as an indivisible web in which all human activities are interconnected.

[4] L. L. Cavalli-Sforza, 'A Panoramic Synthesis of My Research', International Balzan Foundation (Milan, 2000), downloaded from www.balzan.it/Premiati_eng.aspx?Codice=00000004.

Marxists are not the only ones to have had this aim—one thinks of Braudel—but they have been its most persistent pursuers. Let me conclude by quoting one of them, Pierre Vilar, who, like Marx, refused 'any firm division or watertight separation among the various sectors of history. Analysis, of course, remains an essential part of any investigation and the historical profession cannot do without specialization. But economics alone can never fully account for all economic phenomena, nor political theory for all political phenomena, nor the theory of the spiritual for all spiritual phenomena. In each concrete instance the problem lies in the interaction of all these.'[5]

Not the least of the problems for which this is essential, is the crucial one which brings us back to the historic evolution of *homo sapiens*. It is the conflict between the forces making for the transformation of *homo sapiens* from Neolithic to Nuclear humanity and the forces for the maintenance of unchanging reproduction and stability in human collectivities or social environments, which, for most of history, have effectively counteracted them. In my view, this is the central theoretical question suggested by the new perspectives. Today this balance has been decisively tilted in one direction, perhaps beyond the ability of humans to understand, almost certainly beyond the ability of human social and political institutions to control. Perhaps Marxist historians, with some practical experience of understanding the unintended and unwanted consequences of human collective projects in the twentieth century, can at least help us understand how this came about.

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[5] J. Revel and L. Hunt (eds), *Histories: French Constructions of the Past* (New York, 1995), pp. 77–8.